Computer active

ISSUE 721 | 22 OCT – 4 NOV 2025

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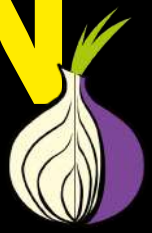

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From the Editor

September 2015 was a turning point for the internet, though few Brits noticed it. That was when US streaming service Hulu started charging people to remove adverts. I remember marvelling at how ingeniously cynical it was. Ten years on and this business model is now everywhere.

It was a sign tech giants wanted to stop giving away their services for free. They now squeeze every penny out of users in ever more devious ways. Genuinely useful freebies are harder to find, let alone stuff that *was* paid for but now costs nothing.

But I love a challenge. I've spent the past few weeks looking for software, apps and AI tools that have bucked the trend, as well as films and TV shows that are now free to watch (though yes, adverts are the trade-off). I found much more than I expected, as you'll see in our Cover Feature.

I can't see the web returning to those pre-2015 days, but then a lot of 'free' stuff back then was rubbish. Perhaps the quality is better now.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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5GB
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1,000 hours
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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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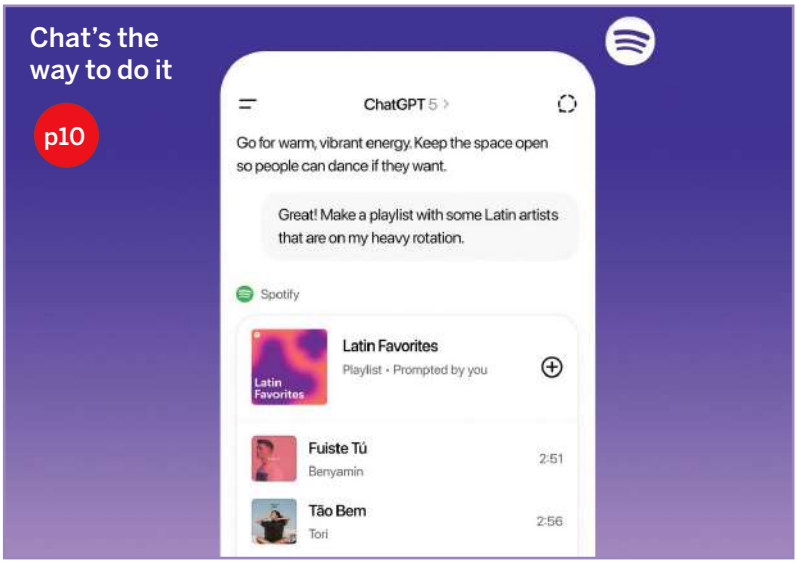

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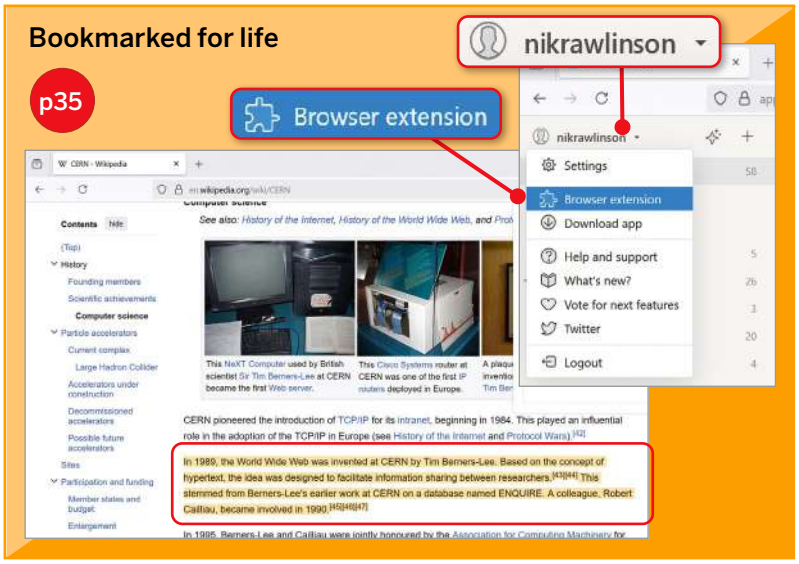
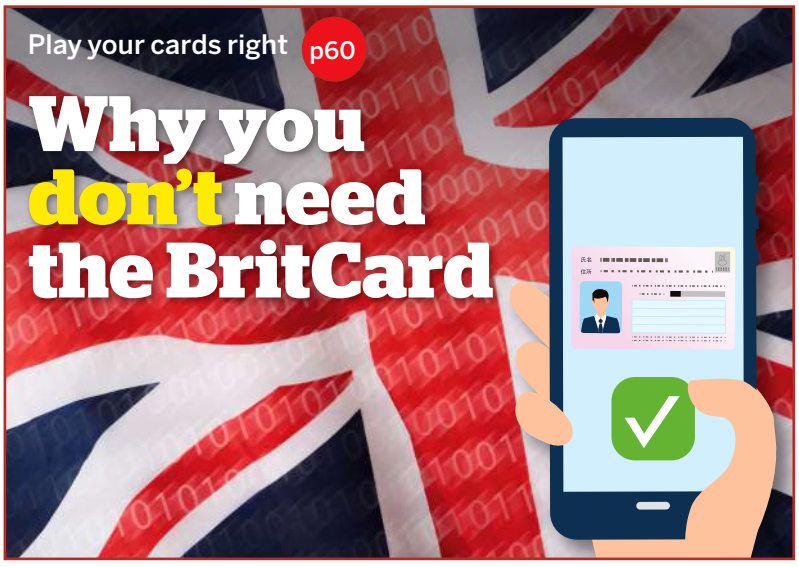




Brits warned not to install money-stealing free VPN

Security chiefs are warning Brits not to install the free VPN and streaming app 'Mobdro Pro IP TV + VPN' because it contains malware that steals money from your bank account.

It was detected by Italian security firm Cleafy, which said it has infected 3,000 devices, mostly in Spain and Italy.

But UK security experts are worried that it'll spread through the UK as users look to bypass the new age-check laws for porn websites.

At first glance the app, which is Android only, appears to offer free access to high-quality IPTV channels, alongside a VPN.

After installing, it asks you for permission to use Android Accessibility Services, which is a legitimate feature that helps users with disabilities.

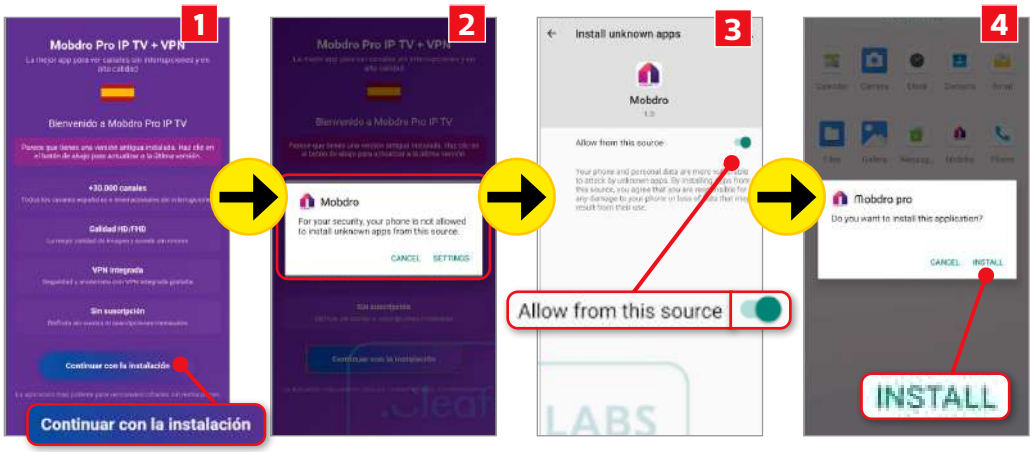
If you grant access, it uses the new malware Klopatra to give the hackers complete control over your device. They can then read your messages, steal your passwords and make fraudulent purchases without you noticing.

The app isn't available on the Google Play Store. Instead, users have to download it by sideloading it from unofficial app stores.

The risk of installing malicious apps is one of the reasons Google is cracking down on sideloading (see page 49).

Cleafy published images of how the app takes over your phone. First you install it from an unofficial app store (see screenshot 1). Next, you have to ignore a security warning 2 and allow your phone to install "unknown apps" 3. Finally you have to confirm you want the app to install 4.

Cleafy said its analysis of the app indicated it comes from a Turkish criminal gang (www.snipca.com/56617).



Credit: Cleafy

WHAT WE THINK

Cybercriminals aren't stupid. They follow the news and know thousands of Brits have downloaded free VPNs to beat the age-verification law. But they (probably) don't know we reviewed the best free VPNs in Issue 717, naming Proton, Windscribe and Privado as our top three. You don't need to look any further than this trio for fast and reliable private connections. And you certainly shouldn't go sniffing around the web for rogue VPNs listed outside official app stores.

Stop AI chatbots getting married, says US lawmaker

A US politician says AI chatbots are getting so good at mimicking people that laws are needed to stop them having human-like rights, such as getting married.

Thad Claggett, a Republican member of the Ohio House of Representatives, has introduced a bill proposing "no AI system shall be granted the status of person or any form of legal personhood".

It adds that AI must never "be recognized as a spouse, domestic partner, or hold any personal legal status analogous to marriage or union with a human or another AI system".

Claggett told Ohio newspaper *The Newark Advocate* that it's "fairly obvious" that in future AI will start taking over "all kinds of things that traditionally only involved humans".

He warned that AI could be "even more dangerous than nuclear weapons because of how widespread it will be".

The proposed law also prohibits AI from owning or managing companies.

You'll like this...
Mozilla is testing a VPN to use in Firefox (www.snipca.com/56616)

but not this...
Hackers stole data from 70,000 gamers on Discord (www.snipca.com/56615)

Windows 7 use rockets as people abandon Windows 10

Windows 7's market share rose to a three-year high in September as users left Windows 10 ahead of support ending.

The surprise jump sees Windows 7 running on 9.61 per cent of Windows computers worldwide, up from 3.59 per cent in August.

This rise closely mirrors a fall in Windows 10's market share in the same month, from 45.53 to 40.50 per cent – its lowest since 2017.

When Microsoft ended support for Windows 7 in January 2020 it was running on 24.9 per cent of computers. It fell to 19.44 per cent the following month and when Microsoft ended extended support for businesses in January 2023 only 9.55 per cent of computers were using it.

It fell to 5.34 per cent in February 2023 and hadn't gone above four per cent until

September 2025. As recently as July its market share was less than one per cent.

The figures, from tech analysts StatCounter (www.snipca.com/56613), also show that Windows 11's market share fell for the second month running. It's now used on 48.94 per cent of machines, having peaked at 53.51 per cent in July.

Companies and users in Asia and Germany seem to be leading the move back to Windows 7, probably because their current computers lack the technical specifications to upgrade to Windows 11.

But this doesn't explain why they're not continuing to use an unsupported Windows 10 and choosing instead to return to an operating system that hasn't been supported for nearly six years – and is therefore much less safe.

Would you ever return to Windows 7? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

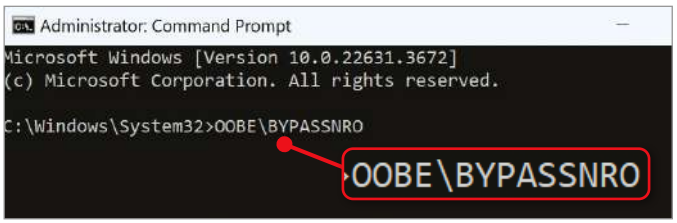
Microsoft to stop you installing Windows with local accounts

Microsoft is cracking down further on loopholes that let you install Windows 11 without signing up for a Microsoft account. Many people prefer to use local accounts when installing Windows 11 because it keeps their details stored on their computer (ie, locally) rather than on Microsoft's servers.

Microsoft never approved of this but generally tolerated the workaround that allowed you to do it.

However, in 2024 it prevented one option of creating a local account, which was by typing example@example.com or a@a.co as the username.

Another option remained,



which was typing OOBE\BYPASSNRO in Command Prompt (see screenshot). But Microsoft has now said it will block that and any similar methods too.

In its release notes for Windows 11 Insider Preview Build 26220.6772, it said it's "removing known mechanisms for creating a local account in the Windows Setup experience (OOBE)".

Microsoft said that using these workarounds cause users to "inadvertently skip critical setup screens", which means they risk using a device "that is not fully configured for use" (www.snipca.com/56609).

The move will force users to create a Microsoft account online when installing Windows 11. It's likely to be implemented in the full version of Windows if it doesn't cause any problems in the Preview builds.

IN BRIEF

PROTON VPN FREE ADDS TWO COUNTRIES

Proton has added servers from two more countries – Canada and Norway – to its free VPN. It brings the total to eight, alongside Japan, Poland, Romania, Singapore, the US and the Netherlands (see screenshot). Proton VPN Free won Gold in Issue 717's review of free VPNs (page 55) – use it at www.snipca.com/56611.

ITVX PREMIUM COMES TO PRIME VIDEO

ITVX has launched its advert-free Premium channel on Amazon Prime Video. It costs £5.99 a month and mostly includes shows from ITV 1-4 and Quiz, as well as live sport. However, it doesn't include all the archived shows that you get if you subscribe directly to ITVX Premium through other streaming services and devices. Read more at www.snipca.com/56610.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Nestled in the foothills of Mount Fuji, Woven City was built by Toyota as a place to safely test self-driving cars, AI-powered homes and delivery robots. The first 350 residents have now moved in, and over 1,500 more will join them later. If you're tempted to relocate, watch www.snipca.com/56608.

IN BRIEF

TRAIN Wi-Fi SPEEDS IN UK ON SLOW TRACK

UK trains have some of the slowest Wi-Fi speeds in Europe, faster only than Austria and the Netherlands. Analysis by Ookla, which runs Speedtest (www.speedtest.net), said the average speed on UK trains is just 1.09Mbps. Sweden is the fastest by far, with 64.58Mbps, followed by Switzerland (29.79Mbps), then Ireland (26.33). See the full results at www.snipca.com/56582.

SAMSUNG & iPHONE USERS COULD GET PAYOUT

Anyone who bought a Samsung phone or an iPhone between October 2015 and January 2024 could win a payout of around £17 if a court case is successful. Consumer campaign group Which? is suing US processor manufacturer Qualcomm for anti-competitive practices, seeking £480m in compensation. The case began on 6 October and is expected to run for five weeks. Read more at www.snipca.com/56584.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

Police in Ireland were called when this homeless man was found sleeping on someone's sofa. Except he wasn't, because it was created by AI to waste police time (www.snipca.com/56586). It's the latest AI craze to prove that the advancement of technology is in direct inverse proportion to human intelligence.

Amazon launches cheapest 4K Fire Stick, but RAM is lower

Amazon has launched its cheapest ever 4K Fire TV stick, priced £49.99. This is cheaper than the launch price of the 2023 model, which cost £59.99.

Called 'Fire TV Stick 4K Select' (pictured), it has only 1GB RAM, half what's in the 2023 model.

But Amazon claims this won't make it slower because it runs on the company's new operating system, Vega OS. It says this is "highly responsive" and allows "fast app launches and smooth navigation" (www.snipca.com/56590).

Vega OS is based on Linux and replaces the Android-based Fire OS. It has been built to work with all Amazon's devices – from streaming sticks to smart speakers and TVs.

However, the Select also compares poorly with its predecessor in Wi-Fi power. It operates on Wi-Fi 5, which has less bandwidth than the Wi-Fi 6 used by the 2023 model.

Both the new Select and the 2023 model have 8GB storage, half of that offered by the 4K Fire TV Stick Max. This was also released in 2023 priced £69.99.

During Amazon's recent Prime Big Deal sale (7 to 8 October) both 2023 sticks were heavily discounted. The standard stick was reduced to £25.99, while the 4K Max was cut to £39.99 – and they're likely to be cut again in any sales before Christmas.

Amazon has also released three new ranges of smart TV: 2-Series and 4-Series (32-55in, from £250) and Omni QLED TV (50-65in, from £650) – see www.snipca.com/56591. Buy the Fire TV Stick 4K Select from www.snipca.com/56588.

Photo-hosting site Imgur blocks Brits amid data-watchdog fines

Photo-hosting website Imgur has blocked people in the UK from accessing its images.

It comes after the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) warned Imgur's US parent company, MediaLab, that it intends to fine it for breaking laws on the use of children's data and checking users are over 18.

The ICO has been investigating Imgur since March, when it said the site didn't ask visitors to declare their age when setting up an account.

It said its findings were "provisional" and that it will "carefully consider any representations from MediaLab" before deciding whether to fine it.

Millions of people use Imgur to make and share images such as memes across the web, particularly on popular online forum Reddit.

But since 30 September anyone visiting https://imgur.com has been met with the message 'Content not available in your region'.

A link takes you to a page saying: 'UK users will not be able to log in, view content, or upload images. Imgur content embedded on third-party sites will not display for UK users.' It doesn't mention the ICO's investigation.

The ICO described Imgur's move as a "commercial decision" and said leaving the UK doesn't mean a company can "avoid responsibility for any prior infringement of data protection law" (www.snipca.com/56587).

First recordable Freely box goes on sale – or does it?

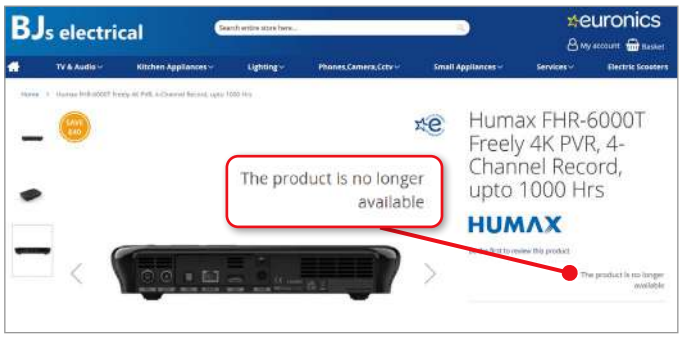
Humax looks set to launch a Freely box that you can record TV programmes on. Called the Humax FHR-6000T Freely PVR Recordable, it has appeared on the websites of several UK retailers.

The listings state the box will be 4K and lets you record "up to four channels simultaneously on a single screen", with a maximum recording time of 1,000 hours.

It also has HDMI 2.1 and USB ports, as well as Wi-Fi, aerial (1 in our photo below) and Ethernet 2.

However, it's not known when the box will be on sale, or even whether it exists officially.

While it appears on the websites BJs Electrical (www.snipca.com/56555), Kings & Barnhams (www.snipca.com/56556) and Sonic Direct (www.snipca.com/56557), they say the box isn't available (see screenshot above).


BJs electrical
euronics
Humax FHR-6000T Freely 4K PVR, 4-Channel Record, upto 1000 Hrs
The product is no longer available
HUMAX

Humax hasn't commented nor has it added the box to its official site (https://humaxdirect.co.uk).

If the box becomes available, it would be the third Freely box in production – and the first to let you record TV.

One of the other boxes is being made by the French manufacturer Netgem and will let you switch between live and on-demand content, and access more than 50 streaming channels.

The BBC is also planning to make a "radically simplified" Freely box, though there are currently no details.

Virgin increases annual price rise, but adds Netflix for free

Virgin Media has increased its annual price rise from £3.50 to £4 a month, but has added Netflix in some packages at no further cost.

The changes affect new customers and those who renew their contract from April 2026.

Like most broadband providers, Virgin previously increased prices annually by 3.9 per cent plus the rate of inflation. But Ofcom has now banned telecoms companies linking annual increases to inflation, and instead insists they state any rises clearly in "pounds and pence".

To soften the blow, Virgin has added Netflix's 'Standard with ads' plan to all its TV deals, as well as to broadband-only packages of M500 (516Mbps) and faster.

Virgin has also increased the base price for its broadband packages. The M125 plan (132Mbps) rises by £2 to £23.99, while M350 (362Mbps) goes up by £3 to £28.99. However, M500 and Gig1 (1,130Mbps) stay at £33.99 and £38.99 respectively.

The changes are part of a major rebranding of services that also sees all TV bundles now come with a minimum M250 broadband speed (264Mbps), up from 125Mbps.

Additionally, Virgin has cut landline prices for new customers signing up to Talk Anytime. They'll now pay £8 per month, down from £15.

Visit Virgin's site for full details of new deals and prices: www.snipca.com/56554.

IN BRIEF

NEW RASPBERRY Pi MINI PC DOUBLES RAM

Raspberry Pi has launched a new version of its keyboard that also works as a mini PC. The upgraded 'Raspberry Pi 500+' (pictured below) doubles the RAM to 16GB, and adds an NVMe SSD slot to join the existing microSD card slot. It comes with a 256GB SSD, but you can remove this for a higher capacity. Buy it for £192 from www.snipca.com/56553.

BRAVE BROWSER HITS 100 MILLION USERS

Brave has said more than 100 million people now use its browser every month. It launched in 2016 and is now one of the best-loved independent browsers. However, its overall market share remains below one per cent, while Google's Chrome has hit a new high of nearly 72 per cent. Read Brave's blog at www.snipca.com/56552.

LEBARA OFFERS eSIMS BUT ONLY ON iPHONE

Lebara is rolling out eSIM support in a "phased manner", which for now means offering it only to new customers with the iPhone Air (see review, page 22). The MVNO, which piggybacks on Vodafone's network, plans to add more phones "for both new and existing customers within this year". Read more at www.snipca.com/56551.

Will ChatGPT's operating system replace Windows?

It has launched apps for tasks you perform on PCs and in browsers

OpenAI has been stunned by how quickly ChatGPT has caught on.

Nick Turley, head of ChatGPT, recently told the website TechCrunch it's "kind of bonkers" that 800 million people use it every week considering it's not especially easy to use. He said that people prefer "going to Mac or Windows and opening applications versus remembering all the commands".

He has a point. At times ChatGPT feels like a glorified Command Prompt, or even a text-based adventure game from the 1980s. You can't launch full software from it, or open websites.

> "ChatGPT wants launching an app to be as easy as clicking a software icon on your taskbar or desktop"

But Turley has a solution. He wants to turn ChatGPT into "an operating system where you can come and use applications. If you want to write, there's an app for that. If you want to code, there's an app for that. If you want to interact with goods and services, there are applications for you."

Goods and services will be the most important for OpenAI because they'll have wider appeal than writing and coding. And because OpenAI can team up with companies to make money.

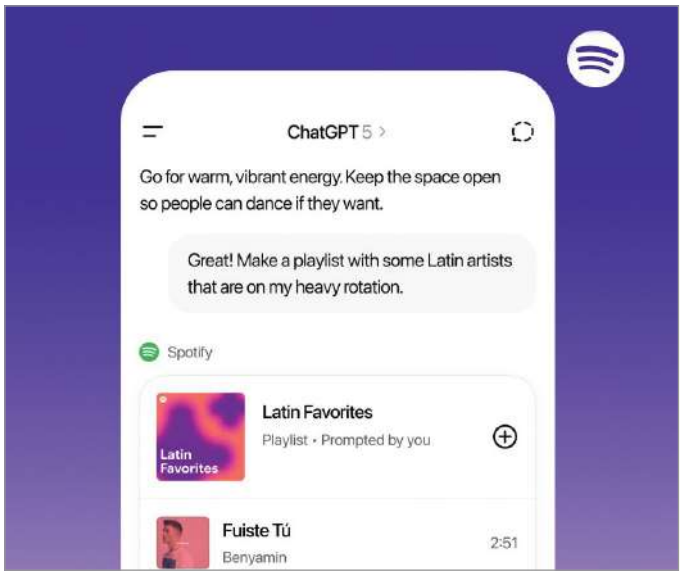
Turley mentioned travel-booking sites Expedia and Booking.com as ideal partners. If customers can book a holiday on those sites without leaving ChatGPT, OpenAI will take a lucrative cut. Indeed, in early October ChatGPT added apps from both companies to its US version, as well as US estate agent Zillow and design apps Canva and Figma.

American users can also now use a Spotify app in ChatGPT, connecting their account so they can create playlists (see screenshot right), ask for recommendations and even play previews of tracks. These apps appear in chats they are mentioned in. ChatGPT wants it to be as easy as clicking a software icon on your taskbar or desktop (watch how they work at www.snipca.com/56621).

If they prove popular in the US, OpenAI will almost certainly launch the apps worldwide. And then more will follow, potentially letting you edit photos and videos, send emails, or post messages on social media – all things you currently do either on Windows or in your browser.

It's the latter that Turley sees as the main inspiration. He said in the past 10 years browsers "have become the operating system".

"How many of us actually use desktop apps?" he asked.


ChatGPT 5 ›
Go for warm, vibrant energy. Keep the space open so people can dance if they want.
Great! Make a playlist with some Latin artists that are on my heavy rotation.
Spotify
Latin Favorites
Playlist · Prompted by you
Latin Favorites
Fuiste Tú
Benyamin
2:51

"You might use Excel or PowerPoint, but most of what we do actually happens in the browser via application-like things."

So while Microsoft might be worried that ChatGPT will lure people away from Windows, perhaps Google has more to lose. Chrome has never been more popular, with a market share of 72 per cent. Its dominance is partly down to how many tasks you can now perform online that previously you needed software for.

But if ChatGPT also lets you perform those tasks, users might start switching from Chrome – and also from its web-based operating system ChromeOS.

It's not the first time OpenAI's ambition has threatened Google. In April, it said it would be interested in buying Chrome if US courts forced Google to sell it, though judges have now ruled that Google can keep it. And in the summer rumours grew that it was building its own browser called Aura.

But Turley's comments suggest that OpenAI is keener to turn ChatGPT into a cross between ChromeOS and Windows – and ultimately become bigger than both. It's already got 800 million people hooked just by chatting. When it can do what your desktop and browser can, it's time for Microsoft and Google to panic.

THE FACTS

- ChatGPT has added apps from Spotify, Expedia and Canva as it aims to evolve from a chatbot into more of an operating system
- They're available only in the US at the moment, but are likely to launch worldwide soon
- 800 million people now use ChatGPT every week

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

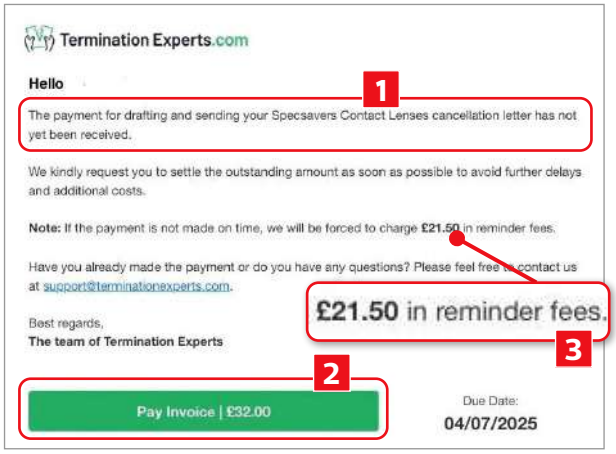
Termination Experts' cancellation fees

What's the threat?

A firm called Termination Experts is charging customers to cancel subscriptions on their behalf, even though cancelling a service should always be free.

The company has been investigated by consumer campaigners Which?. In one example, a Specsavers customer went to cancel a contact-lens subscription online, but accidentally clicked a pop-up from Termination Experts and filled in the details it asked her. Termination Experts chased the customer for "the payment for drafting and sending your Specsavers Contact Lenses cancellation letter" (1 in our screenshot). It asked for a payment of £32 for the letter 2, and threatened a charge of £21.50 in "reminder fees" 3. Specsavers later told her it hadn't received a letter from Termination Experts.

Another example shown by Which? was for cancelling a subscription to PureGym. The customer had searched Google for cancellation options and unintentionally clicked an advert from Termination Experts that used PureGym's branding.


Termination Experts.com
Hello
1
The payment for drafting and sending your Specsavers Contact Lenses cancellation letter has not yet been received.
We kindly request you to settle the outstanding amount as soon as possible to avoid further delays and additional costs.
Note: If the payment is not made on time, we will be forced to charge £21.50 in reminder fees.
Have you already made the payment or do you have any questions? Please feel free to contact us at support@terminationexperts.com.
£21.50 in reminder fees.
3
Best regards,
The team of Termination Experts
2
Pay Invoice | £32.00
Due Date:
04/07/2025

How can you stay safe?

Remember that while a company can charge fees for cancelling a service early, they're not allowed to charge for the act of cancellation itself. Ignore any adverts that claim to do this for you, whether they appear as pop-ups on websites or in search results. Which? said it had seen hundreds of adverts on Google promoting subscription-cancellation services for well-known brands.

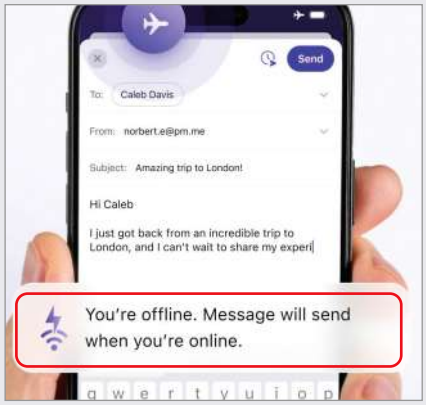
Also ignore any requests from Termination Experts for money. Some people claim that the scammers eventually stop pestering them. If it does get in touch, contact the company for which it claims to have cancelled your membership and ask it whether you still have a subscription.

To learn more about tactics used by Termination Experts, read the comments on the Facebook group 'Scammed by TerminationExperts.com' (www.snipca.com/56501).

New tools | Proton Mail's offline mode

Proton Mail's free apps for Android (www.snipca.com/55324) and iOS (www.snipca.com/55325) encrypt the emails you store on your phone or tablet, making them more secure than Gmail and Outlook. They've just been relaunched to work in offline mode, letting you read, write and organise emails without an internet connection. Your emails sync automatically once you're back online (see screenshot).

You don't have to do anything to turn on offline mode – it's activated by default. You will need to be running version 7 of the app though, so check by tapping the three horizontal lines at the top left and scroll to the bottom. If it's earlier than 7.0, try to update the app by opening the Google Play Store, then tapping the profile icon at the top right. Now tap 'Manage apps and device' then 'Update all' under the 'Updates available' section.


Send
To: Caleb Davis
From: norbert.e@pm.me
Subject: Amazing trip to London!
Hi Caleb
I just got back from an incredible trip to London, and I can't wait to share my experi
You're offline. Message will send when you're online.

If you can't get version 7 yet, wait a few weeks – it's being rolled out globally. It also contains some design changes, explained by Proton at www.snipca.com/56479.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

Tip from 'former Screwfix worker'

I saw a truly bizarre scam on Facebook recently – it was a post from a disgruntled former Screwfix employee seeking revenge on the company. It claims there's a "hidden" way to get a DeWalt 20V MaxPower Tool Kit for "under a tenner". All you have to do apparently is leave a positive review. The post had a photo of the alleged former worker and the tools you could get. It's certainly an original scam. I've seen Screwfix scams before, but they tend to impersonate the company, not claim to be from sacked staff. The post feels authentic, and is bound to catch out some people.

Gary Amos

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Pay to block ads? Most people will just ignore them

Facebook doesn't appreciate the long-term effects of charging people to block adverts (Issue 720, page 7). Some people might want to pay for this privilege, and good luck to them. But most of us will just put up with adverts but pay far less notice to them. That's because by treating them as something 'bad' to avoid, Facebook is stigmatising adverts. It'll probably backfire and mean fewer people click them.

This is true all over the web and on streaming services. It's a doom loop. As adverts continue to be seen only as something irritating to avoid, so advertising companies will have to make them louder and more vulgar to grab attention. That makes them even more irritating, which leads in turn to people ignoring them with greater determination.

Contrast this to the golden age of TV advertising – the 1970s and 1980s. You often heard people saying back then that the ads were better than the programmes themselves. They were certainly wittier and less patronising, and viewers didn't mind watching them. They were part of popular culture, endlessly quotable. I doubt anyone can remember a single online advert they've seen this year.

Bill Fleming

I'll forgive ChatGPT anything if it gets rid of CAPTCHAs

If ChatGPT's ability to solve CAPTCHAs leads to their demise, then I'll forgive AI anything (Issue 720, page 8). I've spent endless hours trying to count motorbikes, traffic lights, buses and almost anything else you're likely to see on the roads, in futile attempts to solve these maddening puzzles.

ChatGPT has given me some really bad advice in the past. It has potential, but more than half of its responses to me have been flawed. But maybe it's not as a chatbot that its future lies. Instead, OpenAI should devote all its resources to solving all the annoyances of the modern internet. After CAPTCHAs, it should try to eradicate cookie-consent pop-ups next.

Jeremy Nevin

Why I didn't need 100Mbps broadband

In Issue 720's story on Openreach testing 8.5Gbps broadband (page 7), you asked us what's the fastest speed we'll ever need. I can't give you a precise figure, but I know it's a lot slower than the adverts and marketing campaigns claim. The most demanding thing I do online is stream Netflix. I signed up during Covid (like millions of others) and also increased my broadband speed to around 100Mbps. I did this because I thought I needed such fast speeds to cope with TV streaming.

It was only after a couple of months watching Netflix that I actually checked the site's recommended speeds (www.snipca.com/56534), and was shocked that it suggested '15 Mbps or higher' for 4K resolution. I had assumed I'd need four or five times that speed.

I still subscribe to Netflix, but I've long since downgraded my BT speed to around 40Mbps, saving me some valuable money in these straitened times.

John Mooney

The main flaw of passkeys

You've mentioned a few times the trend to move away from passwords and use methods that don't require them, such as passkeys. However, it seems some businesses are misunderstanding this and offering password-less access without a suitable alternative.

The most recent one I've come across is Legal & General. They terminated their secure-message service some time ago, so communication is only via phone or email. If you do email then you need to provide personal information, including your date of birth.

To log in you go to their site at https://myaccount.landg.com and enter your email address. On the next page there's an option to 'login without a password?' – this sends a one-time password (OTP). This takes you to a page where you enter your date of birth and click continue. A code is then sent to your email address allowing you to log in without ever having entered any credentials other than date of birth.

So, if your email address was compromised, correspondence is likely to be there containing your date of birth and a scammer would only need that to access your L&G account. L&G tried to tell me that the OTP added an "extra layer of protection", but since it's used as an alternative to the password bypassing it entirely, this isn't the case. I thought I would raise this with you as it seems to present a serious security risk and a worrying trend.

Geoff Burgess

What's the Issue...?

With several old tablets lying around, I need help on making good use of them. Didn't you recommend a few ideas some time last year?

Les Rowan

CA SAYS In Issue 684, page 62.

I need to buy several external hard drives for a project and need advice on which to get. When was your Cover Feature on these devices?

Dave Gregory

CA SAYS That was in Issue 696. Read it and the other features above on our 2024 Back Issue USB Stick: www.snipca.com/53180.

CA SAYS We did, in Issue 686, page 60.

When did you recommend more private and secure alternatives to Google Maps?

Mark Aitken

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If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

Will you publish more Linux advice?

I was interested to read your various writers' different reactions to support ending for Windows 10 (Issue 719, page 62) – in particular Nick Peers' decision to switch to Linux. He made a good case for leaving Windows altogether, and I've been waiting for some years now to see a vindication of my own decision 15 years ago to leave Windows and switch to Linux Mint (https://linuxmint.com).

I've installed Mint on two Macs that I couldn't upgrade, thereby prolonging their lives and taking advantage of good hardware. They're both running the latest version of Mint. I would hope that would be sufficient assurance to encourage users of older hardware to make the change. Given Mr Peers' switch, may we see more reference to Linux in your helpful tips?

Bill Brookshaw

CA SAYS **Yes, we will be publishing more Linux advice in future issues. Many Windows 10 users are switching to Linux as an alternative to upgrading to Windows 11. We imagine dual-booting Windows with Linux will become more popular too.**

I wish I had kept my VHS tapes

New technology is not always a wise idea. I used to have a film library of VHS cassettes, but my collection grew so big (over 1,000) that I ran out of space to store them. I copied them all to DVD (which took quite a while), but if I had the choice I would have kept hold of my cassettes.

My hobby is home videography and editing my footage is easy on all my DVDs. I now have 3,379, and they are all indexed on my computer. I still have the old VHS machines, camera and equipment and regularly get asked to transfer footage to DVD.

It's been said the lifespan of a DVD is not really known, but saying that neither are the streaming services that exist now. They're also vulnerable to being lost at the click of a computer.

Colin Gleave

'Incompatible' devices can still work in Windows 11

After reading Issue 718's 'Windows 10 Survival Guide' Cover Feature, I decided to ignore all the warnings that my machine isn't compatible and pushed through the upgrade via a USB stick installation. A couple of hours later, I have a clean install running great on Windows 11.

This got me thinking how many computers will be thrown away when they could easily be upgraded. I then went to install my Dymo LabelWriter 400, but Dymo's website said Windows 11 isn't supported. It even said Windows 10 wasn't supported, even though I've been using Dymo LabelWriter 400 on it for years. I finally downloaded the Windows 8 driver and my label printer is happily running again. I now wonder how much hardware gets thrown away each year because it's 'not compatible'.

Steve Bowen

Remember, you don't own games you download

Issue 718's 'Question of the Fortnight' made the point that you don't own the music and video you buy online. The same applies to most games you purchase online through Steam (https://store.steampowered.com) and other game stores. If the store closes, you no longer have access to the games you've paid for.

Robert Aindow

STAR LETTER

I'm calling Microsoft's bluff over Windows 10

News
The top stories in the world of technology
Microsoft U-turns on W10 support, but UK misses out
Enroll in Extended Security Updates to stay protected

As a Windows 10 user, my strategy was always to wait until the last minute before deciding whether to keep using it or upgrade to Windows 11. I've read all your excellent advice, and was genuinely uncertain until Issue 720 dropped through my letterbox and I read the news story on page 6 ('Microsoft U-turns on Windows 10 support, but UK misses out', pictured).

The implications of such a dramatic reversal in policy are obvious: Microsoft will eventually have to extend support for *all* Windows 10 users, no matter where they live. It's morally indefensible to refuse extended support to people just because they live outside a particular economic zone.

The past couple of years seems to have been a game of dare between Microsoft and users. First it was adamant that support would end for everyone – no exceptions. When that didn't frighten millions of people into upgrading to Windows 11 overnight, it began to backtrack a little. Each time it did so, I expected it to go further – and so it proved, until its latest drastic U-turn.

So, I've decided to call Microsoft's bluff and will continue to use Windows 10 beyond the 14 October deadline. I simply can't believe the company will be so irresponsible as to leave an estimated 500 million computers at risk of malware. I predict that one of two things will happen. It will either announce extended support for all on the eve of the deadline. Or it will officially end support but fudge it by saying that it'll fix any serious security faults for the next 12 months. Either way, it has lost this game with users.

Michael Bailey

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Can a retailer refuse to examine faulty products?

LEAD CASE

Q I purchased a double oven from a well-known store in March 2023, only using it for grilling. But last July I realised that the top oven wasn't reaching the correct temperature for baking. The manufacturer's warranty had expired, but the seller is refusing to help, saying I've left it too long. I just want to send it back for testing. Can I do that?

Richard Crimins

A Richard can ask, but under the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) the retailer is legally entitled to refuse this. That's because more than six months have passed since purchase. Before this, it's up to the retailer to prove a product isn't faulty. After six months, the responsibility falls on the customer.

Richard can pay for an independent examination to prove the oven was inherently faulty. However, the longer the period since purchase, the harder it is to distinguish an inherent fault from accidental damage or fair wear and tear. Because of this risk, Richard should first tell the retailer he's planning to have the oven independently examined if it keeps refusing to do so. This might prompt the retailer into acting.

If it still refuses and an independent examination does find an inherent fault, Richard should send this evidence to the retailer and ask for a refund, replacement or repair. If the retailer agrees with the verdict, it's allowed only one attempt to fix the problem – whether that's a repair or replacement. If it decides to refund Richard, it's allowed to deduct some money to reflect how long he's used the oven for. However, if it rejects the verdict, Richard's only course of action is to take it to the small claims court.

CASE ONGOING

Why is Amazon fobbing me off to German seller?

Q I bought a Braun coffee maker on Amazon for £55.75, but it has a broken lug nut. I complained to Amazon, but it has passed on my case to a company called Conquest GmbH in Germany. But isn't my contract with Amazon? And if not Amazon, with Braun?

Stan Sabin

A We understand why Stan thinks he should contact Amazon or Braun, but actually his contract is with Conquest. This is an Amazon Marketplace seller, based in Germany ('GmbH' is the German equivalent of Ltd).

Marketplace sellers use Amazon as a platform for selling their products (like The Range also does - see Peter Brice's case on opposite page). Some pay Amazon to handle returns, in which case you'd deal directly with Amazon. But Conquest hasn't paid Amazon for this. The only way Braun would get involved is if it offered Stan a warranty.

Conquest seems to be handling Stan's complaint properly. But if it fails to give him a refund or replacement, he should seek further help through Amazon's 'A-z Guarantee' scheme (www.snipca.com/56545).

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Currys accepts responsibility and fixes laptop for free

Currys has agreed to fix Thomas Jones' Asus Vivobook laptop for free, after accepting responsibility (see Issue 717). It had initially sent the laptop to Asus, telling Thomas that he had to deal with the manufacturer directly. But this was nonsense because the fault (the number 5 key kept falling off) occurred within the first six months of purchase.

However, Thomas isn't impressed by Currys calling the free repair a "goodwill gesture". We agree. Within six months retailers must fix or replace an inherently faulty product, or issue a refund. It can only refuse to if it examines the product and concludes the fault was caused by the customer.

Currys seemed to think Thomas had caused the fault because it wanted to charge him £97 to have it repaired. We then told him to ask for proof from either Currys or Asus that he had caused the damage, but they didn't send this.

We suspect Currys realised its mistake

and decided to save face by calling the free repair a goodwill gesture. It's not the first time it's acted this way, and we doubt it'll be the last. Hopefully, the repair will be carried out without any further problems.

Can we reject late deliveries left on doorstep?

Q In Issue 718's Consumeractive you told Martin Wilkins that he could have refused to accept a late delivery from Dell. However, I find most couriers simply leave parcels at our front door without even pressing our doorbell. So, what are our rights in accepting a delivery we've not been able to refuse?

Malcolm Blyth

A This is a great question, and the answer isn't straightforward. If you bring the goods indoors, then legally you've accepted the delivery. But frankly this is a ridiculous law, and we're not sure whether many sellers know it anyway.

Our advice is to photograph the package where it was left outside, make a note of when it arrived, and store it safely inside. Then contact the seller immediately, attaching the photo, and say you're rejecting the delivery because it was late.

You should give them a deadline to collect it by, and say you expect them to pay for it being returned. Hopefully, the seller will accept this and book a courier. If they ask you to post the parcel back, make sure they pay for the postage labels.

If the seller refuses your request then your last resort is to take them to the small claims court. A judge might stick to the letter of the law and say you were wrong to bring the parcel inside, but we think most would dismiss this as unreasonable and rule in your favour.

CASE CLOSED

Can The Range refuse to help us with Marketplace seller?

Q I ordered an electric blanket online from The Range (www.therange.co.uk) and was told it would be delivered within a few days. Six weeks have passed and nothing has arrived. The Range says it can't help because the blanket is coming from a third-party seller – but isn't my contract with them?

Peter Brice

A We believe Peter bought the electric blanket through a seller that was listed on The Range's Marketplace (www.therange.co.uk/marketplace). This isn't as well-known as Amazon's Marketplace, but it operates under similar rules (see also Stan Sabin's case against Amazon on opposite page). It means that The Range is right to say Peter should contact the seller directly.

We've asked Peter to check whether the seller was using The Range's Marketplace. This is indicated at the top left of a product's

page (see screenshot left), with the company and courier's name shown in orange. Click that and you'll see its contact details.

Companies selling on marketplaces still have to abide by consumer law. In Peter's case, the seller has broken its contract with him by not delivering within 30 days. He should ask for a refund if he no longer wants the electric blanket, or reject delivery if it ever turns up – though he should be aware of the risks in couriers leaving parcels on the doorstep (see Malcolm Blyth's case above).

CASE CLOSED

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Proton offered me two months free for VPN fault

After reading your positive review of Proton VPN (https://protonvpn.com) in Issue 717 (page 52), I decided to sign up for a two-year subscription. I was impressed that this came with a kill switch, port forwarding and split tunnelling.

However, I couldn't get the installed software on my Windows 10 laptop to work. I fiddled with all the settings that I thought might make a difference, but no website would load.

I wondered if the problem was with my Windows 10 machine and considered upgrading to 11. But first I decided to contact Proton for help, and it suggested a few things to try. To my surprise, these worked. Proton then apologised for the problems, although I suspect they realised it was actually my fault! It said it would extend my subscription by two months. It now works perfectly.

James Murray

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact Proton

- **Email** support@protonmail.zendesk.com
- **Online form** www.snipca.com/56549
- **Phone support** www.snipca.com/56550

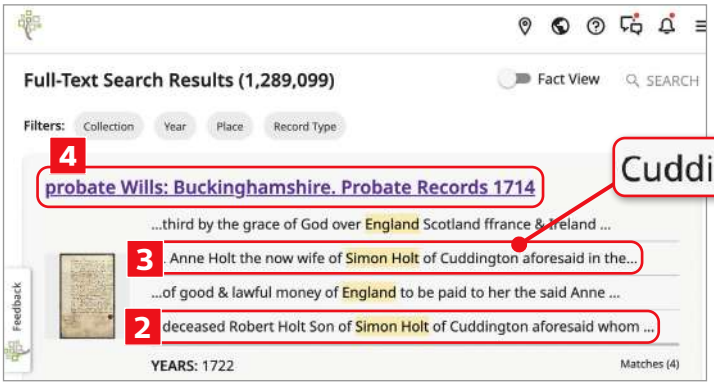
Grow Your Family Tree

A new tool uses OCR to extract text from lengthy documents – and it's completely free. **Richard Holt** explains how to...

Master FamilySearch's Full-Text Search

US genealogy site FamilySearch has launched Full-Text Search – a tool that uses AI and optical character recognition (OCR) to search handwritten and typed documents.

Unlike traditional searches, which only look at indexed fields like names or dates, Full-Text Search scans the full text of each record. This means you can find relatives mentioned anywhere in a document – as witnesses, beneficiaries or tenants, for example – uncovering details you might otherwise never see. It contains almost two billion records from around the world. Here's how to use it.


Full-Text Search Results (1,289,099)
Fact View
SEARCH
Filters: Collection Year Place Record Type
1
Cuddington
4
probate Wills: Buckinghamshire. Probate Records 1714
...third by the grace of God over England Scotland ffrance & Ireland ...
3
Anne Holt the now wife of Simon Holt of Cuddington aforesaid in the...
...of good & lawful money of England to be paid to her the said Anne ...
2
deceased Robert Holt Son of Simon Holt of Cuddington aforesaid whom ...
YEARS: 1722
Matches (4)
Feedback

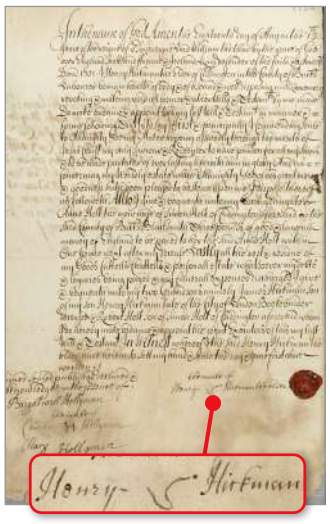
FamilySearch's Full-Text Search extracted mentions of Richard's Holt ancestors from a 1714 will

Type name, keywords and location

First, sign up for a free FamilySearch account at www.snipca.com/56465, then log in and visit www.snipca.com/56466. You can also click Search at the top followed by Full Text. Now type a name and/or any keywords, and also enter a location and year range.

I searched for my 11th-great uncle Simon Holt, adding 'will and testament' as keywords and 'Buckinghamshire, England' in the Place box. The first result mentioned Cuddington (1 in our screenshot above) – a parish linked to some of my Holt ancestors, and included the snippets 'Robert Holt Son of Simon Holt of Cuddington' 2 and 'Anne Holt the now wife of Simon Holt' 3.

Clicking the heading link ('probate Wills: Buckinghamshire. Probate Records. 1714' 4) took me to the original document – the 1714 will of Henry Hickman (pictured left). There, I found Anne Holt named as a beneficiary and Robert Holt – Henry's grandson – appointed as one of the executors.



Clicking the result took Richard to the will for his ancestor Henry Hickman

This record gave me details about Simon Holt's family that aren't recorded anywhere else, showing exactly how Full-Text Search can uncover mentions of relatives hidden deep in historical documents. I've never found Simon Holt's marriage records anywhere, so this document should help me track them down.

See results in Fact View

By default Full-Text Search shows text excerpts highlighted in yellow – as our screenshot above shows. If you find this a bit messy, turn on the Fact View slider at the top of a result. This summarises it to show only persons, places and years mentioned in the document. There are also filters along the top left for collection, year, place and record type.

Also, scroll down the main page for Full-Text View and you'll see 'Advanced Search Tips' on the right. These explain the wildcard searches you can use to narrow your results. For more help, watch FamilySearch's video at www.snipca.com/56475.

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

I've just returned from a lengthy visit to relatives in Australia and learned that I've got some ancestors who fought with the ANZACs in World War 1. Where can I find more information about their service?

Liz Hall

First, visit the National Archives of Australia (www.snipca.com/56469), then click the RecordSearch button and select NameSearch at the top. Now search for your ancestor, selecting 'World War 1' from the 'Category of records' dropdown menu. Also try the Australian Imperial Force database (www.snipca.com/56471), which is drawn from several official sources.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Find ancestors from the Battle of Jutland

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FutureYou CAMBRIDGE

Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

VIDEO CONVERTER

MiniTool Video Converter 4.5

www.snipca.com/56496
What you need: Windows 10 or 11

MiniTool Video Converter is an all-in-one suite for converting and downloading videos, and recording your screen – with audio. Like Any Video Converter (www.snipca.com/55944), which we wrote about in Issue 717 (page 18), it's a freemium program, but you can use most of its features for free without being nagged to upgrade. These include its excellent conversion tool, which supports a wide range of video and audio formats, and lets you select the output quality before you click Convert. You can also optimise videos to watch on Android, iOS and Samsung phones and tablets.

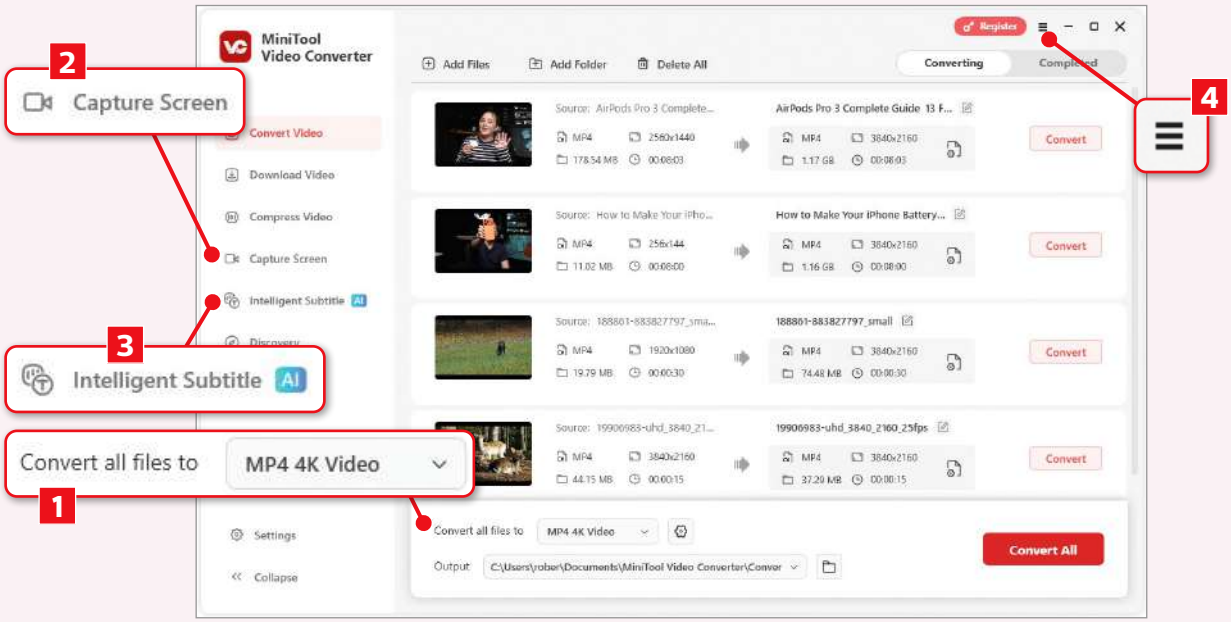
The main restriction in the free edition of MiniTool Video Converter is for video downloads. You can download five full-length videos from sites including YouTube, Instagram and TikTok in MP4 or WEBM format – or extract the audio as an MP3 or WAV file.

Once you hit that limit, the program only lets you download half of any subsequent video. For unlimited downloads, buy a subscription for £12 a month, £37 for six months or £65 a year – click 'Continue trial' to dismiss the upgrade prompt.

The big new feature in MiniTool Video Converter 4.5 is Intelligent Subtitle. This uses AI to generate subtitles for your video and audio files by converting speech into text. The Basic AI model, which MiniTool says is suitable for routine tasks like note-taking, is available for free. To unlock the Standard and Advanced models, you need to pay for a subscription.

However, there's no limit on the number of video or audio files you can transcribe for free. MiniTool lets you correct the transcription before you save the text file, and customise the subtitles to use the font, colour and size of your choice.

Although MiniTool says only the paid-for version of Video Converter offers "all features without watermark", we didn't see a watermark on the videos we downloaded or converted.



1 Click the 'Convert all files to' dropdown menu to set the default format and resolution for your converted videos. Change the conversion settings for individual video and audio files by clicking the Settings icon to the left of their Convert buttons.

2 MiniTool Video Converter's Capture Screen feature records videos of what's happening on your screen. You can capture the whole screen or just an area, and choose between recording sound from your system or through a microphone.

3 To use the new Intelligent Subtitle feature, click Choose Video and select Basic Model to download the free AI model. Add the video or audio you want to transcribe, then select Basic Model again to turn the speech into subtitles.

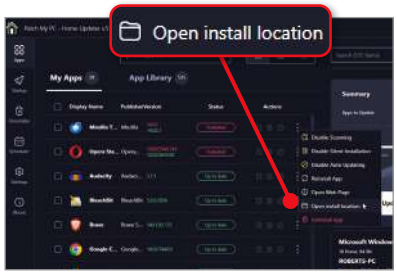
4 Click the three-line menu to apply MiniTool Video Converter's dark theme, access its online manual and configure its settings. Most usefully, you can change the default folder for your converted, downloaded and recorded videos.

SOFTWARE UPDATER

Patch My PC Home Updater 5.3.1.0

www.snipca.com/56500

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



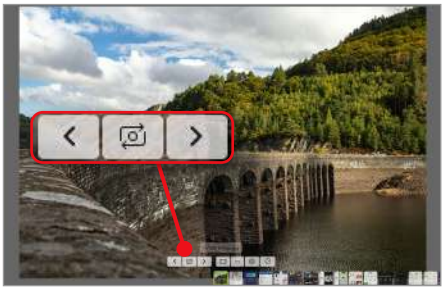
The latest version of Patch My PC applies several small but welcome updates to the brilliant software updater. It adds support for ARM-based versions of programs, which are becoming common now more PCs have ARM processors – examples in Patch My PC's Library include Chrome, GIMP and PowerToys. Another improvement lets you stop a specific tool updating or installing, without cancelling the process for other software. Patch My PC will no longer notify you when updates are available for programs whose auto-update settings you've disabled. Additionally, when viewing installed tools in your My Apps list, you can now directly access the folders they're stored in. Click the three-dot icon in the Actions column and choose 'Open install location' (see screenshot).

IMAGE VIEWER

FlyPhotos 2.5.6

www.snipca.com/56494

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



This lightweight photo viewer doesn't have a traditional interface, but instead integrates with the Windows context menu. Right-click an image, select 'Open with Fly' and it will be instantly displayed on a transparent grey overlay. Scroll your mouse wheel to zoom in and out. At the bottom of the overlay are controls for viewing the next or previous images in the folder, and rotating photos through 360 degrees (see screenshot). Other settings include adjusting the transparency level of the overlay or making it a solid colour, and choosing the default image-display size. There are no editing tools, because the developer wants to recreate the simplicity of the long-discontinued Google Picasa Photo Viewer. FlyPhotos triggers a Smart Screen warning, but it's safe to use (see its VirusTotal report at www.snipca.com/56489), so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

£ SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Revo Registry Cleaner Pro

www.snipca.com/56504

Price: £11.12 a year **Free trial period:** 30 days

What you need: Windows 7, 8, 8.1, 10 or 11

The benefits of registry cleaners are much debated. Some people say they're 'snake oil' because Windows maintains the registry itself, while others insist they're useful for removing broken and redundant registry entries.

Revo Registry Cleaner puts a friendly face on cleaning the registry if you want to decide for yourself. It offers a free version and a low-priced Pro edition, and takes precautions to ensure you don't mess up your PC.

Before you do anything with Revo Registry Cleaner, it prompts you to create a full registry backup. You can then choose from four scan modes: Safe, Moderate, Advanced and Managed, with varying levels of analysis.

Revo excludes critical system files from scans, but whichever mode you choose is likely to find lots of invalid registry entries. Select which items to clean and click the Clean button – you can optionally create a system restore point before proceeding. There's also a Quick Clean feature that scans and cleans in one click.

The Registry Tuner tab (see screenshot) lets you apply more than 50 registry tweaks simply by switching sliders on and off. These include customising Windows' appearance, disabling unwanted tools and speeding up load times.

The Pro version has a Registry Watcher that monitors specific registry keys for changes and lets you schedule automatic registry clean-ups and backups. But we're not sure why you need to pay such forensic attention to a Windows component that generally maintains itself.

OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

Removing junk entries from the registry may have small performance benefits, but it really isn't necessary. While Revo Registry Cleaner makes the task simple and safe, your PC can easily survive without you installing either version.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

What's a good replacement for Microsoft's Mail and Calendar apps?

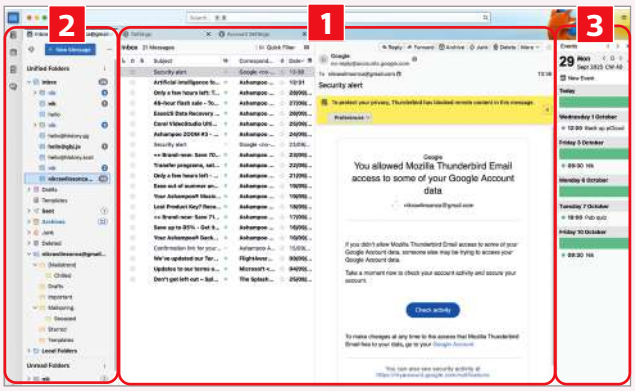
Q I've been meaning to replace my Microsoft's Mail and Calendar apps all year, after support ended last December. What's a good alternative for a Windows 11 PC?

Katherine Bullen

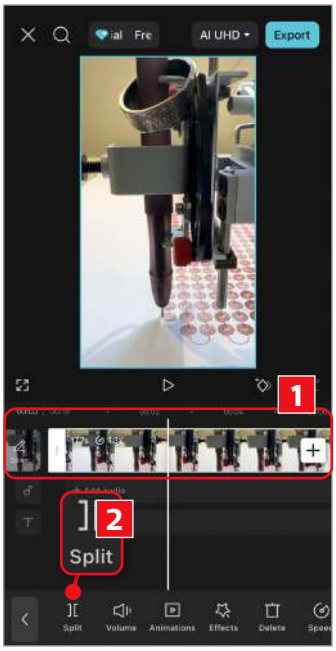
A If you want to keep your email and calendar in one place, you won't go far wrong with Thunderbird (www.thunderbird.net). It's been around for more than 20 years and still has a very traditional look and feel, with a pane-based layout that you can customise depending on your screen size.

On our large PC screen we keep both our message and email content full height (1 in our screenshot below), with enough space for mailboxes 2 and calendar appointments 3 on either side. That way, we get an overview of our day without constantly scrolling. If you don't like its default appearance you can change the fonts it uses and install a new theme. You should have no problems using it with an Outlook.com (or Hotmail) or Gmail account, nor with an email address hosted at your own domain, if you have one.

As well as email, it has a fully fledged calendar that works with privately hosted and Google Calendars; an address book (which, again, can share data with server-based address books like Google Contacts); and a to-do list. You can build on these core features by installing extensions, with a wide selection of official add-ons from www.snipca.com/56387.



How can I edit videos on my phone?

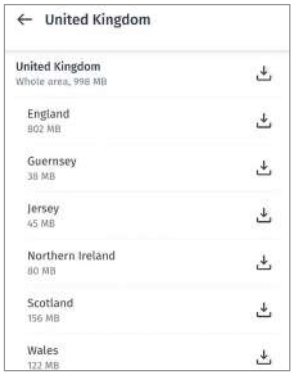


Q I'm fed up having to transfer videos recorded on my Android phone to my laptop. I've always done this because I assumed PC software offers more options. But I'm happy to lose those now if it means I can edit videos with some swipes and taps on my phone. Any ideas?

Eric Frost

A We recommend CapCut (Android www.snipca.com/56390; iPhone (www.snipca.com/56391). You have to pay for some effects and transitions, but there are plenty of fantastic free tools. Import your videos then rearrange them on the timeline (1 in our screenshot). To edit them, tap Split 2 and delete what you don't need.

Which map apps switch offline automatically?



Q As a keen user of map apps while on walking holidays, I'm looking for one that switches to offline mode when I can't get a signal, but I don't know where to look. Can you help?

Roger Griffiths

A Try the app Here WeGo, which is owned by German car manufacturers Audi, BMW and Daimler and is available for Android (www.snipca.com/53940) and iPhone (www.snipca.com/53941). To download a map, scroll up from the bottom of the screen and tap 'Download maps'. Now navigate through the countries (see screenshot) until you arrive at the map you want to save, then tap it. You can set the app to work with the downloaded data by tapping 'Offline' on the home screen, but it should also switch to it automatically if you lose your connection.

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

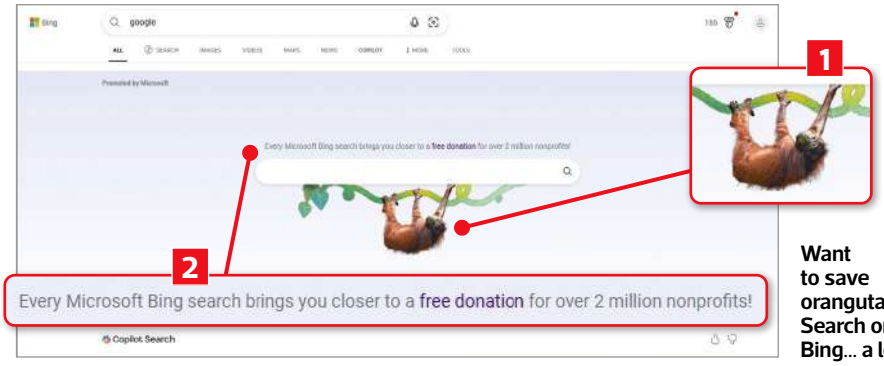
SOFTWARE WARNING!

Microsoft's measly charity donations through Bing

Millions give to charity each year, and there are lots of ways you can do it. But we doubt many of you would have thought to do so through Microsoft. It wants to change that – which is why it's tugging at your heart strings in search results.

Have a look at the screenshot above right. I took it on my PC after searching for 'Google' in Microsoft's browser Edge. The orangutan 1 is a clear attempt to impersonate Google's popular doodles, and not for the first time. Back in Issue 702, I mocked Microsoft for another Google-like doodle that smacked of desperation.

But what I didn't notice then was a line under the doodle saying 'Every search brings you closer to a free donation for over 2 million non-profits!'. For its latest doodle Microsoft has moved this to the top 2, but the intention is the same. The 'non-profits' are charities and organisations



Want to save orangutans? Search on Bing... a lot

signed up to Microsoft Rewards. Click the link and you'll go to a page (www.snipca.com/56532) where you can tell Microsoft where to donate some of the Rewards points you've earned by searching on Bing. It comes out of Microsoft's ad budget, so doesn't cost you anything.

Microsoft donates £1 for every 1,000 points – but it'll take you a while to hit that target

What's wrong with that, you might ask? Well, to donate £1 you have to earn 1,000 points (see screenshot below left). Microsoft only gives you five points per search on Bing, so you have to make 200 searches before you can donate – and beginners are restricted to 50 points a day. I doubt I make 200 searches a month, especially now AI chatbots contain many of the answers. That's not going to save many orangutans.

Microsoft isn't lying when it says every Bing search brings you closer to a free donation. But most users would expect the results to be quicker and more generous. Set up a direct debit to your favourite charity instead.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Microsoft www.snipca.com/56478

"A new breed of industry-leading company is taking shape – Frontier Firms. These organizations blend human ambition with AI-powered technology to reshape how innovation is scaled, work is orchestrated and value is created. They're accelerating AI transformation to enrich employee experiences, reinvent customer engagement, reshape business processes and unlock creativity and innovation."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Jargon: the final frontier. Our endless mission – to orchestrate drivel that no one has orchestrated before.

KEUMARS' VILLAINS OF THE FORTNIGHT

Kwabena Edusei and his dating fraudsters

Take a bow, Kwabena Edusei (37, pictured). At seven years and 10 months, he's got the longest sentence of five fraudsters who stole more than £2.3m from almost 100 victims in dating scams between 2017 and 2024. He's joined behind bars by Fawaz Ali (27), George Melseaux (40), Michael Quartey (28) and Ebenezer Tackie (42), who'll each serve between three and five years.

These repulsive Romeos manipulated vulnerable people into thinking they were in genuine relationships, then tricked them with sob stories into sending money to cover fake expenses, including fines in remote locations and urgent travel costs.

Their romantic reach stretched outside the UK to victims across Europe, the US and Australia. They were eventually caught by Surrey Police and convicted at Guildford Crown Court.

Credit: Surrey Police

SMARTPHONE | **£999** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56485

Apple iPhone Air

Light fantastic

Apple's not exactly known for shaking things up when it comes to its iPhone releases. Yes, you get software updates, gradual performance improvements and tweaked design, but it's typically a strategy of refinement. The iPhone Air is a radical departure from that approach. It takes a bold step forward in contrast to its more conventional iPhone 17 and 17 Pro stablemates, sacrificing a little performance level, some camera lenses and battery life. It even ditches the traditional SIM card, relying entirely on an eSIM to accommodate its slick, lean new styling.

> "Measuring 5.64mm thick and weighing a mere 165g, it takes the definition of 'lightweight' to a whole new level"

And that is, first and foremost, what draws the eye – the iPhone 17 Air is a thing of beauty. Measuring just 5.64mm thick (pictured below) and weighing a mere 165g, it takes the definition of 'lightweight' to a whole new level. It's made from a mixture of titanium and what Apple calls its Ceramic Shield to ensure there's plenty of rigidity and strength in this otherwise dainty device. Its incredibly clean contours of metal and frosted glass just ooze class, all while retaining IP68 protection from dust and water.

It's not without its trade-offs, though. Compared with the iPhone 17 (£799 from www.snipca.com/56486 – see Issue 720, page 23), battery size is far smaller, and aside from the selfie camera you get only a single 48-megapixel main camera (losing out on both ultrawide and telephoto lenses).

Also, its A19 chip runs slower than in the iPhone 17 Pro and Max. In our tests, it was no faster than the standard iPhone 17, which costs £799.

And yet, we're being quite picky here. Battery life still comfortably lasts a full working day with moderate usage, while performance is more than enough to handle mobile gaming and calls simultaneously, for example. Not exactly a light workload. As for storage, there are three versions – 256GB, 512GB and 1TB – with each step-up adding £200 to the price.

Then there's the display – Apple's Super Retina XDR OLED screen with a resolution of 2376x1260 pixels is 6.5 inches across the diagonal. It's slightly bigger than the iPhone 17's screen, which gives apps, text and videos more room to breathe. In short, the entire front of the device is taken up by screen – and we love it.

It's seriously bright at a maximum of 3,000cd/m², with punchy, vibrant colours, and impressively smooth navigation thanks to the higher refresh rate found on all of the iPhone 17s. And the bezels around the screen edges are microscopically thin.

Despite only having two cameras, the Air still produces sharp, natural-looking photos and impressive portraits, as long as you don't zoom in too much. But if you're after the iPhone with the best camera, you're better off with the standard model, rather than the Air.

Looked at separately, this is a great phone. But you're paying a lot for the wafer-thin design – and that won't suit everyone anyway. The iPhone 17 beats it in every area apart from looks. Yet the even better buy is to grab last year's iPhone 16 at £699 – £100 less than its launch price. When we tested it we thought it was the best iphone for years, and we haven't changed our mind – no matter how impressive the Air is.

SPECIFICATIONS

Hexa-core Apple A19 Pro processor • 12GB RAM • 6.5in 2736x1260-pixel resolution 120Hz Super Retina XDR OLED touchscreen • 256GB, 512GB or 1TB storage • 48-megapixel rear camera • 18-megapixel front camera • IP68 ingress protection • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 6 • iOS 26 • 156.2x74.7x5.6mm (HxWxD) • 165g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56485

VERDICT The thinnest iPhone ever is a design triumph, but Apple has made better phones for less

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 16 £699 Now £100 cheaper than its 2024 launch but just as fast, this is a much better buy

LAPTOP | **£1,099** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56491

Gigabyte Gaming A16

Play time

Taiwanese manufacturer Gigabyte's A16 laptop blurs the lines between gaming, home and and business needs. Look deep enough into the specifications, and you'll find a laptop that seems to be full of some of the latest and quickest components. There's 1TB of SSD storage, 16GB of DDR5 memory, and an Nvidia RTX 5060 graphics card all sat alongside a slightly ageing Intel Core i7-13620H processor – so let the games begin!

And yet, it doesn't quite feel like a gaming laptop. There's no bold, gaudy angles here, big bulky frame, or ridiculous RGB logos. Instead you get a clean and slick design with a lovely black metallic finish, subtle embossed logos, and, well, little else. It's cool, quiet and understated.

> "A powerful laptop for work and play that handles graphics and office tasks well"

But there's a caveat to all this – the A16 runs an 85W variant of Nvidia's RTX 5060 graphics card. That's significant because the card typically runs at 100 to 115W. More power equals more performance, and the difference between 85W and 115W is stark. On average games are 14-per-cent slower. When playing games frame rates dropped from 102fps with the 115W version to just 82 on the 85W one. You can improve frame rates using Nvidia's upscaling, but it's still lower than at 115W.

The reason Gigabyte has cut speed is to extend battery life – and it works. Even though the A16 comes with a modest 76Wh battery pack, it managed to keep going in our test for a little under three hours. This is almost twice as long as rival gaming machines.

Performance levels are also pretty decent, and although it has a two-year-old processor, it handles graphics and office tasks solidly. These are helped by the SSD's nippy 6GB/s sequential read and write speeds.

The screen is excellent too. Its responses are crisp and smooth thanks to a 165Hz refresh rate, and while it isn't an OLED panel (so you won't be getting those rich punchy colours typical of that technology), its IPS display means colour balance is absolutely top notch.

For the price, the A16 is remarkably well-rounded. Build quality, storage capacity, memory performance, battery life and screen technology are all impressive. And yet, the underwhelming graphics leaves a sour taste in our mouth.

If you're just looking for a laptop with a bit of processing muscle and a capable battery that'll handle any game you throw at it, the A16 is a great option. But if gaming isn't a priority, you're better off with MSI's Prestige 16 AI+ (£1,100 from www.snipca.com/55962).

SPECIFICATIONS

Ten-core Intel Core i7 13620H processor • 16GB RAM • Nvidia RTX 5060 85W graphics • 16in 1920x1200-pixel 165Hz IPS screen • 1TB SSD • 2x USB 3.2 Gen1 ports • 1x USB 3.2 Gen1 Type-C • 1x USB-A port • 1x HDMI port • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • 1x Gigabit Ethernet port • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • Windows 11 Home • 22.9x358.3x262.5mm (HxWxD) • 2.2kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56491

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *T3* and *What Hi-Fi*, and the websites Tom's Hardware (www.tomshardware.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A versatile laptop for work and play, the A16 delivers superior all-round performance at a reasonable price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

MSI Prestige A16 AI+ £1,100 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD make this very fast, while battery lasts 17 hours

LAPTOP | **£700** from Lenovo www.snipca.com/56535

Lenovo Chromebook 14

Breaking Windows?

A launch price of £700 for a Chromebook is a big ask for many in today's economic climate. ChromeOS has come a long way since its launch in 2011, but that price tag places this particular Lenovo model firmly in the firing line of a number of decent Windows laptops, and that's a big hurdle to overcome.

> "A restrictive operating sytem contained within a beautifully crafted device"

Google built ChromeOS around the idea of providing a budget alternative to more expensive Windows laptops and PCs. This was achieved by using cheaper ARM components that had lower memory and storage requirements.

That's always come at a cost, though. Unlike Windows, with its comprehensive back catalogue of compatible programs and apps, ChromeOS effectively limits you to what your web browser can manage and apps in the Chrome Web Store. Ideal if you're just using Google Drive or browsing the web, less helpful if you're performing advanced tasks like editing 4K videos.

Therefore this Chromebook has to do a lot to justify that hefty price, and happily, Lenovo has delivered. The build quality is exquisite. Its clearly Apple-inspired design easily rivals the very best MacBooks. It feels like a premium product that's a joy to look at and use. There's a bulge in the centre of the lid that makes it easier to open. And weighing just 1.26kg, it's a doddle to carry around.

The keyboard is a bit stiff, admittedly, but once you get used to it, it feels just as special. The large touchpad is wonderfully silky also, making gestures and navigation effortless. The only major downside is a lack of ports, with only one USB-A, two USB-C and a headphone jack. It does come with both Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 5.4 though.

Performance, as you'd expect from a laptop at this price, pushes the limits of what ChromeOS can do. Light productivity work is a breeze, and you can even get away with some undemanding gaming as well – even given the limited 16GB of RAM. However, more resource-hungry games struggled with the Chromebook 14's integrated graphics.

It comes with a gorgeous OLED panel delivering a crisp 1920x1200-pixel resolution across its 14in diagonal. Images are sharp, with vibrant, punchy colours, though its glossy screen does suffer from reflections under bright lights.

Like most ARM devices, battery life beats Intel and AMD. It lasted 14 hours when playing videos. The problem then lies in how closely priced it is to several Windows-based rivals. Acer's Aspire 14 AI (£699 from www.snipca.com/56513 – see review Issue 720, page 24) is the same price as an ARM-powered laptop, with more ports, better performance, and far greater software compatibility. That's clearly something Lenovo is aware of as well, as we're already seeing limited-time deals, reducing the price to £600.

It's a laptop that just doesn't quite know what it wants to be. On the one hand, you have its restrictive operating sytem, and on the other, a beautifully crafted device with a vibrant OLED panel and top-of-the-range build quality. If you find it discounted, then snap it up as soon as you can; otherwise, you're probably better off buying a Windows laptop like the Aspire 14 AI.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core MediaTek Kompanio Ultra 910 processor • 16GB RAM • Integrated ARM Immortalis-G925 MC • 14in 1920x1200-pixel 60Hz OLED screen • 256GB SSD • 2x USB 3.2 Type-C • 1x USB 3.2 Type-A • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 5.4 • ChromeOS • 16x314x219mm (HxWxD) 1.26kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56511

VERDICT Outstanding design and dependable performance are let down by its high price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Acer Aspire 14 AI £699 Windows and ARM working in tandem deliver solid performance and battery life all backed up by a fantastic build quality

MINI PC | **£499** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56536

Geekom Mini IT12 2025

Bargain chip

Recently refreshed for 2025, Geekom's Mini IT12 is an intriguing mini PC for those with a very specific set of needs. If you're looking for a system that forgoes dedicated graphics cards and saves space, while still providing excellent value and solid performance for general office and light creative tasks, then this is it.

> "Its tiny case packs in a superior processor and ports a plenty"

To be clear, Geekom's not exactly revolutionised the design with its new edition. You still get the same 32GB of DDR4 RAM and 1TB SSD, as well as the same chassis complete with its tiny dimensions, and generous complement of ports, including a 2.5GB Ethernet socket and twin HDMI 2.0 ports. But Geekom has changed the processor, replacing the Intel Core i7-12650H chip with the more powerful Core i7-1280P.

While both launched in 2022, the 1280P is significantly more efficient. Not only does it use less power, but it also packs in more efficiency cores, which are designed to manage background tasks and less demanding software, rather than diverting workload to the more resource-hungry performance cores, which are better suited to high-intensity creative tasks.

Additionally, it also features Intel's Iris Xe onboard graphics, which are far more potent than the UHD Graphics found in the older model. This makes everyday tasks slightly faster, and editing photos and videos much faster.

Sadly, you're still not going to be playing the latest games at maximum settings – you'll need a machine with a dedicated graphics card for that. However, if you use advanced video-editing software, the CPU upgrade is a welcome one. Geekom's managed all this without increasing the price too.

The real beauty of the Geekom Mini IT12, though, comes in its design. It's small – seriously small, measuring just 117x112x49.2mm, and is surprisingly sturdy too. Perfect for if you're on the move a lot or desk space is limited. You can mount it to the back of a monitor with the included VESA mount, and if you need more from it, you can easily open it to upgrade both the RAM and SSD.

The Mini IT12 continues to be a remarkably small and versatile machine. If you're not worried about the latest top-of-the range games, but want something that's competent enough to handle any creative and office task you throw at it, then it's a solid choice.

SPECIFICATIONS

14-core Intel Core i7-1280P processor • 32GB RAM • Intel Iris Xe graphics • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • 1x 2.5Gbps Ethernet port • 2x HDMI ports • 1x USB 2.0 Type-A port • 3x USB 3.2 ports • 2x USB4 Type-C ports • 1x SD card reader • 3.5mm audio jack • Windows 11 Pro • 117x112x49.2mm (WxDxH) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/56536

VERDICT A compact PC perfect for productivity and creative tasks without breaking the bank – just don't expect to play demanding games on it

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

GMKtec NucBox G10 £270 A much cheaper PC for those on a budget and ideal for light office work and web browsing

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Microphones

What are they?

A microphone is a transducer that converts sound into an electrical signal and is designed to capture and record audio. The tiny ones found in phones, laptops and ANC headsets or earbuds are known as MEMS microphones.

How do they work?

MEMS microphones have a wire mesh inside that vibrates when it captures audio. A processor then changes that vibration into a digital recording that the phone or laptop can recognise.

Modern phones and laptops, such as the iPhone 16 Pro Max (pictured), have multiple mics (also known as a mic array). This enables features like noise cancellation (where a second mic will pick up background noise and remove it from what the main microphone is capturing), and beamforming (where multiple microphones focus on a single voice coming from a specific direction, while ignoring everything else). Beamforming is used in smart-home speakers to listen to you from across the room.

What are their specs?

The main spec to look for is the number of microphones used, and whether or not the phone or laptop supports beamforming or noise-cancelling. More microphones suggest superior noise cancellation, as each mic is able to target a different set of sounds. Frequency response is also important, because this indicates how effectively it can record. Ideally, you want a microphone with a frequency response of 100Hz to 8kHz, as that range closely resembles human speech.

Can I change it later?

Although you can't upgrade or replace built-in microphones on laptops and phones, you can connect a headset with a better-quality mic, or alternatively buy a dedicated USB mic if the quality of your recordings is poor.

SMARTPHONE | **£649** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56540

Xiaomi 15T Pro

Specs savers

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

In a world filled with iPhone Airs and Samsung S25 Ultras, it's nice to find a brand that's innovating at the cheaper end of the spectrum. Xiaomi's 15T Pro looks to be doing exactly that, delivering impressive specs at a reasonable price, but it's not without its flaws.

While this isn't the Chinese brand's flagship phone, it happily competes with the likes of Samsung's S25 series and even Apple's latest iPhones in many areas. The screen, for example, is a 6.83in AMOLED panel with a 144Hz refresh rate and a 2772x1280-pixel resolution, making it silky-smooth to navigate and surprisingly sharp. For context, Apple has only recently moved its basic iPhone 17 to a refresh rate that high.

It's not quite as bright as the 14T Pro's screen, with a peak brightness of just 3,200cd/m² (versus 4,000). However, in direct sunlight we found everything on screen was perfectly visible.

The more interesting element is the camera setup. As well as a standard selfie cam, the 15T Pro comes with a triple-cam system, comprising a 50-megapixel primary lens, 12-megapixel ultrawide unit and an additional 5x optical telephoto lens. They've all been designed and tweaked by the renowned camera company Leica – and it shows. It captures some simply stunning images, with remarkable colour accuracy, although it does have a slightly narrow depth of field in close-up shots.

Xiaomi is using a MediaTek Dimensity 9400+ ARM-based processor, which did a solid job handling apps in our tests, and that's backed up with 12GB of RAM and 256GB of storage on the basic model (although you can get 512GB and 1TB versions too). Battery life is generous as well, with its 5,500mAh unit keeping it running all day in our tests, while it charges to full in 36 and 56 minutes (wired and wireless respectively).

The only downside? The software. It runs everything on a heavily modified version of Android 15 (called HyperOS), which, sadly, is packed with Xiaomi's bloatware. You can remove most of it, but it's still annoying. Also, you should ignore Xiaomi's app store, which tries to force unnecessary apps on you as soon as you open it.

But despite this, the 15T Pro is an excellent phone. What Xiaomi has achieved – balancing cost, performance, design and battery – is impressive.

SPECIFICATIONS
Octo-core MediaTek Dimensity 9400+ processor • 12GB RAM • 256GB, 512GB or 1TB storage • 6.83in 2772x1280-pixel resolution AMOLED touchscreen • 50-megapixel rear camera • 12-megapixel ultrawide rear camera • 50-megapixel telephoto camera • 32-megapixel front camera • IP68 ingress protection • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 6 • HyperOS 2 (Android 15) • 162.7x77.9x8mm (HxWxD) • 210g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56540

VERDICT With impressive performance, impeccable cameras, a sensible design and a reasonable price tag, the 15T Pro is hard to resist – just ignore the bloatware

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE
Samsung Galaxy S25 FE £649 With slightly lower specs, it can't quite match the 15T's performance, but the operating system is far better

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best tablet for watching the news in my pub?

Q I've just retired and now want to buy a sturdy and flexible tablet to accompany me in pubs and cafes. I used to just read the news on my tablet, but now I want a foldable device that I position on a table so I can also *watch* the news (through my earbuds of course!). I'm not bothered about the operating system, and I'm happy to spend up to £900.

Ken Bradshaw

A With that generous budget we'd suggest the HP Envy x360, which runs Windows 11 Home. We liked the 13.3in edition when we tested it back in Issue 691, but we can't find that on sale anywhere.

Instead, we now recommend the 14in model, which is currently priced £900 on Amazon (www.snipca.com/56594, pictured) – though it fell to £570 during sales in early October, and might do so again before Christmas.

It's a 2-in-1 laptop-tablet with a 360-degree hinge that lets you bend the screen completely backwards, or stand it as pictured. Lots of other devices do this, of course, but the Envy x360 has an IPS screen to guarantee outstanding video quality. It's exceptionally bright, which you'll appreciate in dark pub corners.

Battery life is superb too. It played continuous video for 15 hours 37 minutes in our tests. That's a lot of news you could get through!

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EARBUDS | **£119** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56546

Cambridge Audio Melomania A100

Listen up

These are one of the best earbuds money can buy right now. Cambridge Audio's Melomania A100s are outstandingly well priced, delivering exceptional audio quality and a battery life that's leagues ahead of the competition.

The reason it doesn't score a five-star Buy It! award is the active noise-cancellation (ANC), which is average at best. And phone-call quality is disappointing given the A100s have three microphones in each ear.

They look a bit dated too. They're quite similar to Apple's AirPods, lacking that modern 'stemless' design found in the likes of Google's Pixel Buds Pro 2 (£220 from www.snipca.com/56543).

SPECIFICATIONS

39-hour battery life with case • Active noise-cancellation • Bluetooth 5.4 • IPX5 ingress protection • 4.7g per bud • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/56546

Still, they fit snugly and are impressively robust, feeling like they would survive the odd fall-out. The compact charging case – like the buds – is available only in a rather austere gray or black.

What the A100s lack in styling, though, they make up for in spades with sound quality. There's no spatial audio here, but everything still sounds incredible. Music is warm and rich with punchy bass and plenty of detail in the mid- and high frequencies.

You can also use Cambridge's 'DynamEQ' feature, which brings more bass to the table when you're listening at low volumes, meaning you no longer have to crank up the loudness or dip into an equaliser.

That's backed up by an impressive 12-hour battery life (with ANC enabled), or 39 hours total with the charging case.

VERDICT With class-leading audio and outstanding battery life, the A100s are surprisingly good for the price

★★★★½

ALTERNATIVE Apple AirPods 4 £169 They cost more, but have better controls and offer smoother integration with iOS

PORTABLE SPEAKER | **£130** from LG www.snipca.com/56542

LG Xboom Grab

Sounds AI-mazing

While the application of AI in today's world is a contentious issue, there's no doubting its ability to analyse data and pick out trends faster than you can blink. That's something LG is banking on with its latest portable speaker, the Xboom Grab.

At first glance, the Xboom looks like many other portable speakers, with its modest dimensions, black mesh finish and red logo. There's a light strip on the bottom that shows you when Bluetooth is activated and when you're connected. Throw in a few elasticated straps on either end – allowing you to hang it up or attach it to your bag – and that's about it.

SPECIFICATIONS

30W total power output • 20-hour battery life • Bluetooth 5.4 • USB-C for charging • 71.6x211x70mm (HxWxD) • 0.7kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56542

There's nothing to really shout about, until you dive into the software.

In essence, LG uses AI to do two things here: analyse the song playing and optimise the sound for the best audio performance possible. It also adjusts its own speaker settings to suit the size of the space around it. All of which created bright, immersive sound in our tests, with crystal-clear treble and mellow bass notes. It's flawless, no matter what music you play through it or where you are.

It also has a dedicated app, meaning you can still adjust and customise the equaliser levels to your own liking if the AI can't quite hit the right note for you. And thanks to those built-in microphones, it'll work with Siri and Google Assistant. You can make calls through it too.

Its battery lasted 20 hours when we had the volume at 50 per cent. It comes with IP67 dust and water resistance so will survive most outdoor environments, and connects easily to other LG devices via Auracast. In short, there's a lot to like here, for not a lot of cash up front.

VERDICT AI-powered audio analysis creates superb sound from this small, sleek Bluetooth speaker

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE JBL Charge 6 £170 With similar AI features, this also delivers incredible sound, but costs £40 more

SMART SCREEN | **£179** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56547

Eufy Smart Display E10

Home care

The E10 from Eufy could be so much more. Right now, it's an 8in portable screen that syncs nicely with your Eufy home-security setup, and for that, it's great. You can use it as a tablet – unlike the TP-Link Tapo H500 we reviewed in Issue 720 (£120 from www.snipca.com/56548); mount it on a wall; leave it in its dock; or carry it around your home with you. It lets you answer your doorbell and check your security feeds whenever you want.

However, it's only compatible with Eufy security products. This is in contrast to the H500, which has Matter integration giving it complete control over a wide range of smart-home devices from various brands. The E10 can't even work with Eufy's non-security devices, including its robo-vacs and other smart-home gadgets.

Still, for £179 you get a respectable tablet that – assuming you have a Eufy security setup – does exactly what you need it to. Link it up to your Wi-Fi, and you can access your burglar alarm, smart doorbells, security cameras and smart locks, showing up to four security-camera feeds at any one time, and giving you control over the lot. It fires into life when a visitor presses your doorbell, and can sort camera recordings by recognising the faces of people in shot.

The E10 is quick and easy to add to an existing system, via the Eufy app. It comes with a charging dock, power adapter and USB-C cable, plus a wall mount, a set of screws and two types of wall plug. It's a nice size too. Excluding the dock it measures 201x139x16.5mm, and it only weighs about half a kilo.

The screen quality isn't amazing, so it's never going to compete with a premium tablet, but then it doesn't need to. You're not streaming 4K Netflix here.

General performance is impressive. During testing, notifications arrived in less than a second, and pulling up video feeds was also pretty instantaneous.

Battery life was very impressive. In our tests, it managed a whole week without needing a charge, although we weren't live-streaming to it constantly. It charges quickly too. If you tend to leave it on the dock or plugged into a USB-C charger, it's unlikely to drain at all. It even comes with a built-in kickstand so it can still be propped up when removed from the dock.

As well as a simple touchscreen for controlling your cameras and security system, the E10 has power and volume buttons on the top edge, and a red emergency button that sounds your home alarm with a press and a swipe of the screen to confirm.

The E10 is an oddity. It has incredible potential if it worked with non-Eufy software. As it stands, it only makes sense if you already use Eufy's security system at home.

SPECIFICATIONS

8GB storage • MicroSD card slot • 8in 1280x800-pixel screen • Wi-Fi 6 (2.4 or 5GHz) • 1x USB-C • 139x201x16.5mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/56547

VERDICT This is the ideal accessory if your home is protected by Eufy's security, but look elsewhere if it's not

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Amazon Echo Hub £170 Control practically everything for the same cost

DO I REALLY NEED...

A solar-powered keyboard?

What is it?

Logitech's Signature Slim Solar+ K980 (pictured) is a wireless keyboard powered by the sun and artificial light.

What does it do?

The LightCharge bar at the top captures light from any natural or artificial source, converting it into energy to charge the internal battery. It requires a minimum of 200 lux to work properly. Logitech says it lasts four months once fully charged.

What's the catch?

There's no backlight, its flat design won't suit everyone, and at £100 it's a bit steep (www.snipca.com/56595). Also, it was only released in September, so we've not had time to check Logitech's four-month claim.

So can I do without it?

Ask us again in four months.

NEXT ISSUE

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GMKtec NucBox M6 Ultra
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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

MSI Prestige A16 AI+
£1,100 from www.snipca.com/55962
Tested Issue 718

A powerful Copilot+ laptop with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD to guarantee fast performance. Screen is excellent too, while battery lasts an impressive 17 hours.

ALTERNATIVE PCSpecialist 16 Fusion British-made laptop with superb screen and built for advanced AI tasks. £996 from www.snipca.com/55094

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £613 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 11
£329 from www.snipca.com/54887
Tested Issue 711

With a faster processor and increased storage (from 64GB to 128GB), the 2025 edition of the iPad is simply stunning. Battery life is over 11 hours, which is better than any other iPad, including more expensive models.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

OnePlus Pad 3
£529 from www.snipca.com/55302
Tested Issue 714

With an incredibly fast processor and stunning 13.2in screen, this is the best ever Android tablet, and rivals the iPad Air. At launch both the 12GB RAM/256GB and 16GB/512GB versions were £529, so grab the latter as soon as possible.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £649 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£699 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £495 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

Samsung Galaxy A56
£495 from www.snipca.com/54585
Tested Issue 709

The successor to Samsung's mid-range A55, this has a stunning screen and lasted over 29 hours in our tests. It's faster than Google's Pixel 7a in all tasks, and has AI-powered photo tools.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 7a Cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, it uses AI to improve photos and lasts 10 hours. Has fast processor and 8GB RAM. £460 from www.snipca.com/56073

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

GMKtec NucBox K11
£700 from www.snipca.com/54341
Tested Issue 707

A fast and powerful machine, but what really sets it apart are the ports letting you upgrade it – such as the OCuLink connection for graphics cards. Also has six USB ports, 32GB RAM (upgradeable to 96GB) and a 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 Too small to accommodate many ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD and SD card slot for adding storage. £799 from www.snipca.com/55383

EBOOK READER

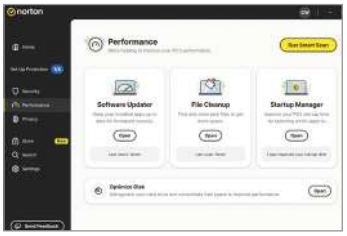
Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Deluxe 2025
£14.99 from www.snipca.com/54797
Tested Issue 629



Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm Gen Digital, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a three-device, two-year licence at a special discount price. Other versions are available.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Obsbot Meet SE
£67 from www.snipca.com/54725
Tested Issue 710

The Meet SE from Chinese firm Obsbot beats the picture quality of our previous favourite, Logitech's C925e. Colours are vibrant and accurate, with terrific detail even in poor lighting thanks to a relatively wide aperture.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £45 from www.snipca.com/56585

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£182 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£84 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £84; 2TB costs £162.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £86 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 2 Netgear Orbi 370 two-pack units

Winner of our Recommended award in Issue 720 (page 25), the Netgear Orbi 370 is a dual-band Wi-Fi 7 mesh network system for homes – delivering a consistently superior performance across your entire property.

It provides flawless Wi-Fi from the front door to the back garden, guaranteeing simultaneous 4K streaming, video calls and gaming, so everyone in your household can enjoy uninterrupted performance. It has a top speed of 3.6Gbps, can connect up to 70 devices and covers an impressive 3,000 square feet.

All Netgear routers are built with an additional layer of security including Advanced Router Protection, automatic firmware updates and powerful safety features to help protect you and your family.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/56481 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 4 November. Good luck!

You can buy two units of the **Netgear Orbi 370** for £209.99 and three units for £299.99 from www.snipca.com/56431. For more information on Netgear's products, including 5G mobile routers and range extenders, visit www.netgear.com/uk.

PRINTER

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e
£181 from www.snipca.com/53101
Tested Issue 700

A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono costs 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £150 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB
£180 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Sharp GM6245K
Has a fantastic 43in screen with superb contrast, and 4K content looks especially detailed. Comes with TiVo for paid-for streaming and Freely for free live channels and catch-up. £230 from www.snipca.com/55940

ROUTER

TP-Link Archer BE550
£190 from www.snipca.com/55981
Tested Issue 718

This tri-band router is the first Wi-Fi 7 model to be our top choice. It had enough bandwidth across our test house to stream six 4K movies simultaneously, and has five 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports.

ALTERNATIVE Asus RT-AXE7800
Our previous favourite is also tri-band, but only on Wi-Fi 6E. That still delivers incredibly fast speeds that stretched deep into our test house. £180 from www.snipca.com/52957

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35 Manage bookmarks better with Raindrop
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48 In the Club: Plan club events

HOW TO...

Manage your bookmarks better with Raindrop

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Raindrop account **Time required:** 30 minutes

Browser bookmarks have been around for more than 30 years. The world's first browser was called WorldWideWeb (later renamed Nexus). It was built by Tim Berners-Lee, who also came up with the concept of the web that we use today, and released for free in 1990 for anyone to download and use. You can see a screenshot of it at www.snipca.com/56457.

It didn't have bookmarks as we know them, but did store a system of home pages, which the user edited within the browser itself and to which they could add links they needed to remember. You could create several such home pages, in the same way you might create multiple folders to organise the bookmarks you save to your browser.

The first iterations of WorldWideWeb couldn't display text and images side by side (images opened in a separate window). However, NCSA Mosaic, which appeared in 1993, overcame this, and it became one of the most popular browsers of the early internet.

It also had a feature called hotlists, which is closer to what we'd recognise as today's bookmarks. The following year, Netscape Navigator introduced a similar feature, called 'bookmarks'. Most of us still use that term today.

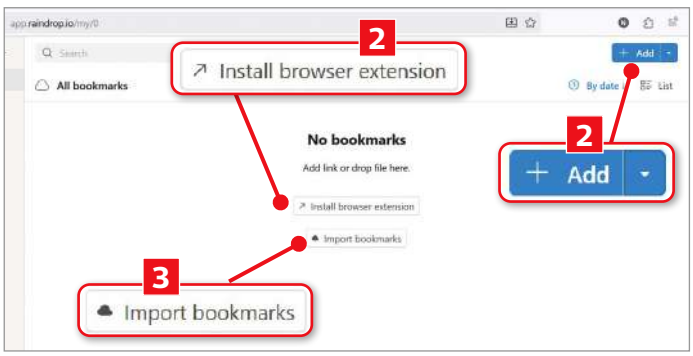
But those early bookmarks always had one shortcoming: they were stored on your computer. So, if you were away from home or simply using a different computer on the same network, they were out of reach.

That changed in 2009, when Google Chrome introduced bookmark synchronisation, letting you access bookmarks across multiple versions of Chrome as long as you were signed into the same account. This even worked across platforms, so bookmarks saved to Chrome on a PC would be accessible to the same user, logged into the same account, using Chrome on their Apple or Android device.

This is now common practice, but each implementation is still a walled garden. If you have an Android phone, PC and iPad, you might be using Chrome on your phone, Edge on your PC, and Safari on your iPad, with separate lists of saved bookmarks on each.

Unless you want to manually manage your saved sites through an online document on Google Drive or similar, the simplest solution is to manage your bookmarks externally through a bookmark manager like Raindrop (www.raindrop.io). We considered Raindrop when deciding where to move our links after the read-it-later service Pocket (www.getpocket.com) shut down earlier this year – see Issue 714, page 35. It didn't make it to our shortlist as we wanted to save full article contents, which is only possible with a paid-for Raindrop account.

Nonetheless, you can save and manage regular bookmarks for free in Raindrop. It's easy, with lots of clever features, as we'll explain.



Your bookmarks list will initially be empty, but there are three options that let you add them

How I manage by bookmarks

I work across Windows, macOS, Linux, Android, iPhone and iPad, so I have bookmarks scattered all over the place. I've often resorted to emailing them between machines, but now that I've set up a Raindrop account I'm going to force myself to get out of that bad habit. I've lost far too many useful links that way in the past.

Nik Rawlinson

How do you manage your bookmarks? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

1 Export your bookmarks from your browser

Open a new browser window and visit www.raindrop.io. Click 'Sign up' on the home screen, and provide a username, your email address and a password. Read through the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy, then click the blue 'Sign up' button.

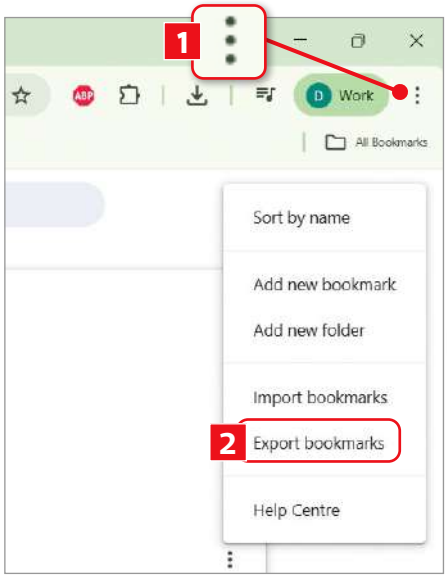
As soon as you click 'Sign up', you'll arrive at your empty bookmarks list. Here, add your first bookmark by clicking the '+ Add' button (1 in our screenshot on page 35), installing a browser extension 2 or importing your bookmarks 3. Start by importing your existing bookmarks so they synchronise across other computers, tablets and smartphones on which you install Raindrop.

First, you need to export your bookmarks to a file from the program that currently has access to it. The process for doing this depends on which browser you're using.

If you have Chrome, click three three dots to the far right of the address bar, then hover over 'Bookmarks and lists' and click 'Bookmark manager'. Now click the three vertical dots top right (1 in our screenshot below) followed by 'Export bookmarks' 2. Save the file in your Downloads folder so it's easy to find later.

If you're using Edge, press Ctrl+Shift+O to open the Favourites menu, then click the three horizontal dots at the top of the pop-up box, followed by 'Export favourites'. Again, save the resulting file in your Downloads folder.

In Firefox, click the three horizontal lines to the right of the address bar and hover over Bookmarks in the menu. Next, click Manage Bookmarks followed by 'Import and Backup', then select 'Export Bookmarks to HTML'.



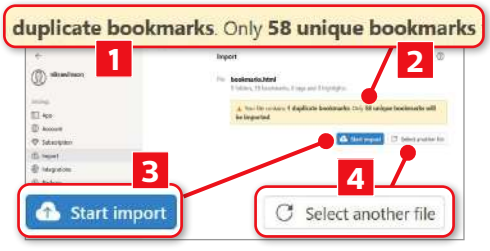
In Chrome, click the three vertical dots followed by 'Export bookmarks'

2 Import your bookmarks file to Raindrop

Now return to Raindrop, then click 'Import bookmarks' followed by 'Upload file...'. Navigate to the exported bookmarks file that you saved in your Downloads folder, select it, and click Open. Raindrop will examine the file and tell you both how many duplicate (1 in our screenshot below) and unique 2 bookmarks and folders it contains. Click 'Start import' 3 if you want to add them to your Raindrop account, or 'Select another file' 4 if you've chosen the wrong one.

When it's finished importing your bookmarks, Raindrop will do a little bit of organising in the background, so they might not all appear immediately. However, you can use this time wisely, as you can continue importing bookmarks from each of your other browsers and, in doing so, combine them as a single master list. You can also import from non-browser tools, like Evernote and Pinterest (Raindrop has further details about how you can work with these services at www.snipca.com/56458).

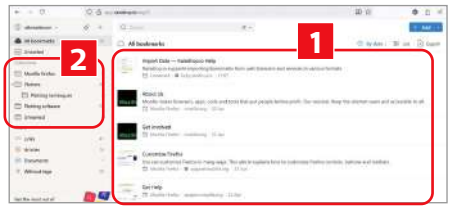
Click 'Go to home' if you want to start working with your existing bookmarks, or 'Select another file' if you want to add further bookmarks to your list, then repeat the steps outlined above.



Raindrop lets you know how many duplicate and unique bookmarks are in the folder you want to import

3 See bookmarks organised as 'Collections'

When you return to your dashboard by clicking 'Go to home' or clicking the left-pointing arrow at the top of the screen, you'll see the list of bookmarks you've just imported in the main pane (1 in our screenshot below). In the sidebar you should also see a list of Collections 2, which are the folders into which you had organised your bookmarks in the browser. When you click a link, it will open in a new browser tab so that the Raindrop dashboard remains just a click away.

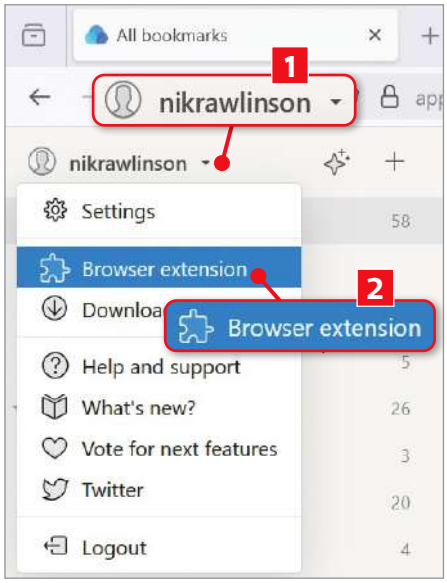


Collections in the sidebar are like the folders you used to organise your bookmarks when you saved them in the browser

4 Use Raindrop's browser extension

When you want to add further bookmarks to your list, you have two options. You can log into Raindrop again at www.raindrop.io and click the '+ Add' button at the top of your dashboard, or you can use Raindrop's browser extension to add them with a single click while you're browsing. We'd recommend the latter as it's far quicker and much less effort.

Click your name at the top of the dashboard (1 in our screenshot above right) followed by 'Browser extension' 2.

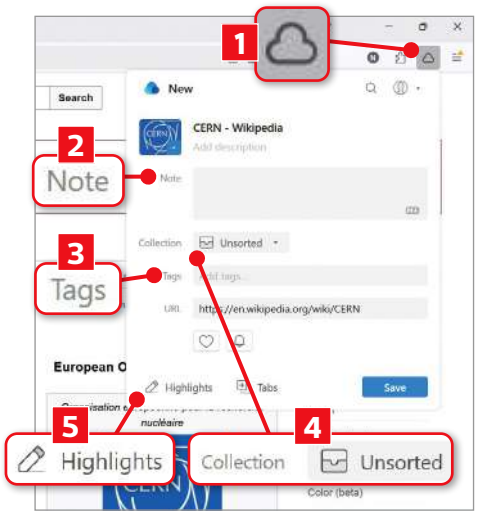


Installing the browser extension makes adding bookmarks quick and easy

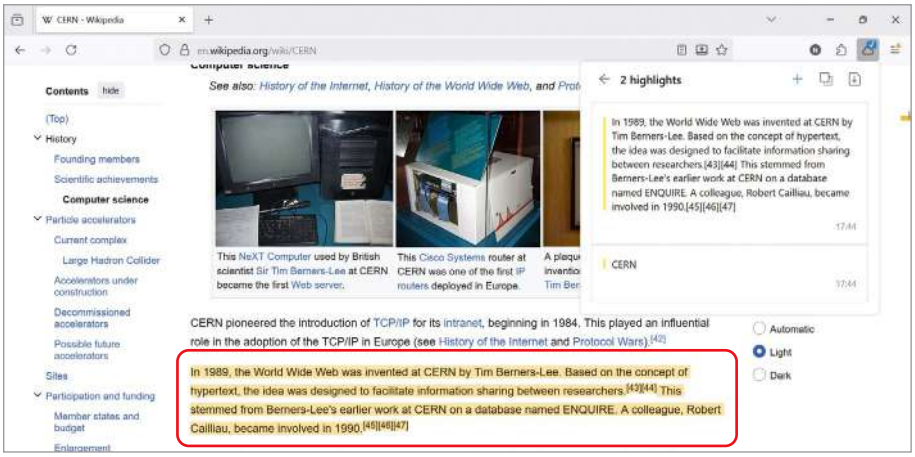
Click the icon for your browser on the following page, then click the button to add it to your browser.

The extension will automatically be added to the address bar, where it will look like a small cloud (1 in our screenshot below). Click this when you're next viewing a web page that you want to add to your Raindrop list. Add notes 2 and tags 3 to give your bookmark more information and make it easier to find when searching.

As you'll notice from the 'Unsorted' box beside Collection 4, the link won't be automatically added to any of the collections that exist in Raindrop's sidebar. If you do want to add it to one, click Unsorted, then click the Collection you want to use. If the collection doesn't yet exist, don't worry: you don't need



Click the cloud icon to save a bookmark, then add tags and notes


2 highlights
CERN pioneered the introduction of TCP/IP for its intranet, beginning in 1984. This played an influential role in the adoption of the TCP/IP in Europe (see History of the Internet and Protocol Wars).
In 1989, the World Wide Web was invented at CERN by Tim Berners-Lee. Based on the concept of hypertext, the idea was designed to facilitate information sharing between researchers.[43][44] This stemmed from Berners-Lee's earlier work at CERN on a database named ENQUIRE. A colleague, Robert Cailliau, became involved in 1990.[45][46][47]

Raindrop can highlights sections on web pages, making them easy to find

to return to the Raindrop dashboard to create it; simply type the name in the search box at the top and, as long as it doesn't match an existing collection, it will appear in the menu, with a '+' to the left of its name. Click this to create the collection and add the current page.

5 Highlight interesting sections of a web page

Note that there's a Highlights option 5 at the bottom of the box. This helps you keep track of relevant sections on a long page. Here, we're bookmarking the Wikipedia page about CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research). As you might imagine, it's packed with interesting information, but at the moment we're only interested in the section about the invention of the World Wide Web there in 1989. We'll therefore click Highlights and mark up that part.

When you click Highlights for the first time, Raindrop will warn you that the service will need to access the data on the web pages you visit. This is different to just accessing names and addresses, so it wants to check that you're aware of that fact. If you're happy for it to do this, click Continue.

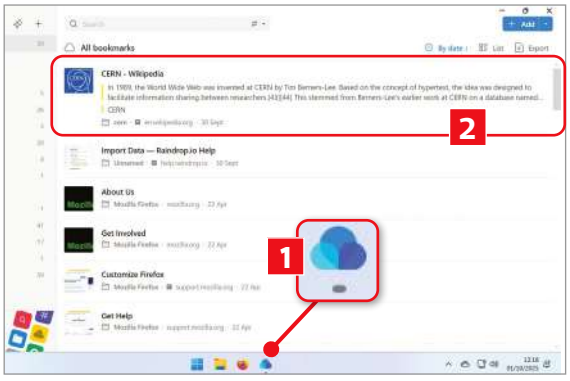
The browser itself should now pop up an alert asking for your permission to grant this access to the extension (it may be below the box on which you've just clicked Continue). Allow it. You shouldn't need to grant this permission again, so you'll not need to do this for every highlight you add.

Now scroll down to the section of the page you want to highlight, click and drag the cursor over the relevant text, then press Alt+X. The text will be highlighted in yellow (see screenshot above) so it's easy to spot when you next scroll through the page. If you've highlighted several sections, click the Raindrop button on the address bar, followed by Highlights, and a list of all the highlights you've created on the current page will appear. Highlights also appear in the list of links on the Raindrop dashboard.

6 Install the desktop version of Raindrop

As well as the online dashboard and browser extension, Raindrop has programs for Windows, Linux and macOS computers, and apps for iPhone and iPad and Android. You can find links for all of these at www.raindrop.io/download.

We particularly like the desktop software, as clicking a link there opens it in our default browser. By keeping the software pinned to the taskbar (1 in our screenshot below) we can quickly return to our saved bookmarks – such as the one for CERN 2.



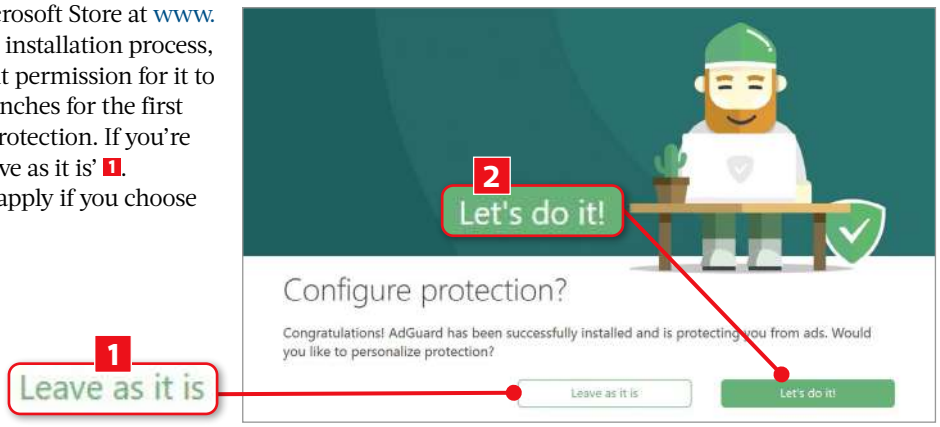
Raindrop's desktop software lets you quickly return to your saved bookmarks

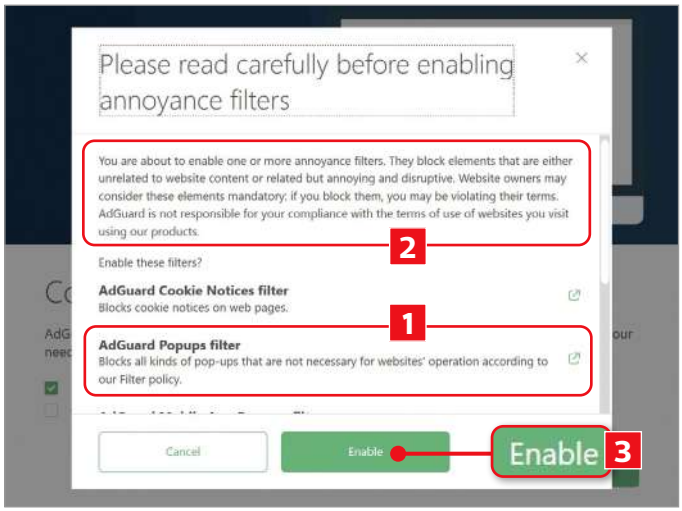
Block ads and fingerprint tracking

What you need: AdGuard
Time required: 30 minutes

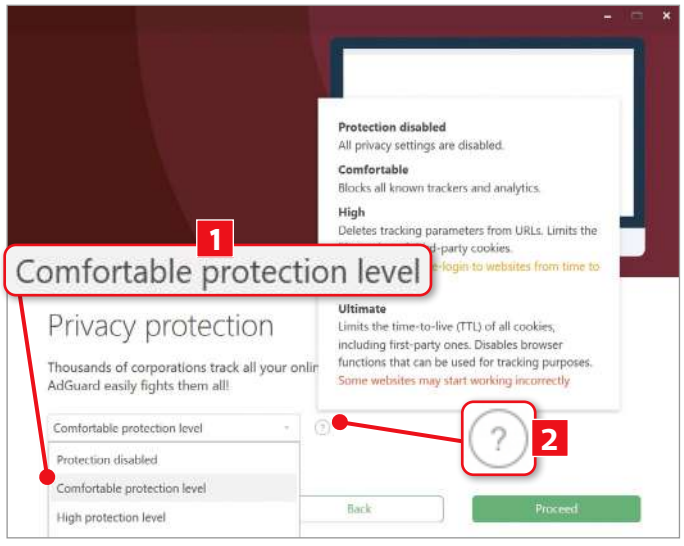
Ads are annoying, but they can be blocked. AdGuard, which is available to download to your PC to prevent ads within programs and as a browser extension to remove them online, has just been updated. Alongside its built-in filters, it lets you apply additional block lists for other online annoyances, such as pop-ups and even dubious websites. And you don't need to create these yourself. As we'll explain here, you can simply download filters that users of AdGuard and other tools have compiled and shared for anyone to use. We'll also point you towards a great new feature from Windscribe VPN, which reduces websites' ability to track you online.

STEP 1 Download AdGuard from the Microsoft Store at www.snipca.com/56503. As part of the installation process, when prompted you need to grant permission for it to make changes to your system. When it launches for the first time, it will ask if you want to configure protection. If you're happy to stick with the defaults, click 'Leave as it is' 1. Otherwise, click 'Let's do it!' 2. Steps 2-4 apply if you choose the latter option.

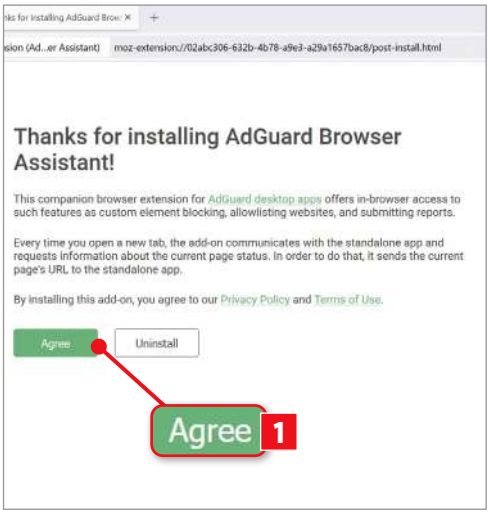

2
Let's do it!
Configure protection?
Congratulations! AdGuard has been successfully installed and is protecting you from ads. Would you like to personalize protection?
1
Leave as it is
Leave as it is
Let's do it!

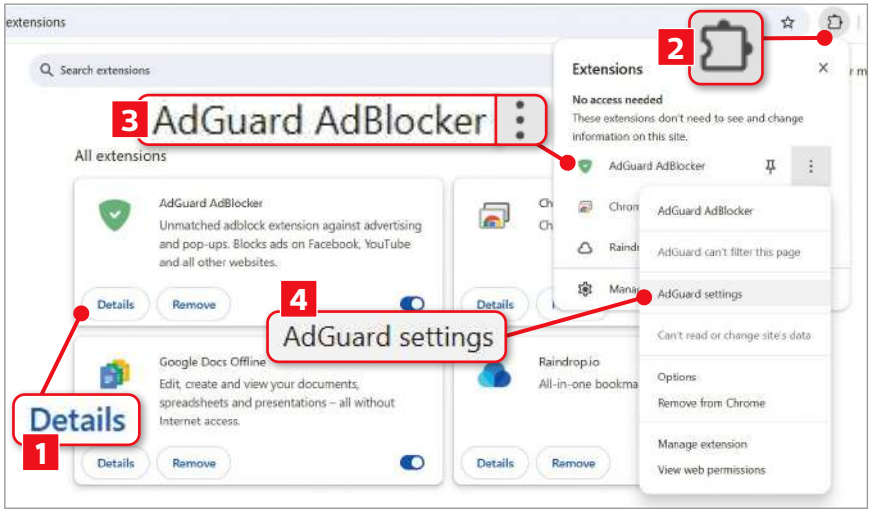

Please read carefully before enabling annoyance filters
You are about to enable one or more annoyance filters. They block elements that are either unrelated to website content or related but annoying and disruptive. Website owners may consider these elements mandatory: if you block them, you may be violating their terms. AdGuard is not responsible for your compliance with the terms of use of websites you visit using our products.
2
Enable these filters?
AdGuard Cookie Notices filter
Blocks cookie notices on web pages.
1
AdGuard Popups filter
Blocks all kinds of pop-ups that are not necessary for websites' operation according to our Filter policy.
Cancel
Enable
Enable
3

STEP 2 The AdGuard setup process provides options to block search ads, self-promotion ads and so on. On each page, tick the box beside each option you want to enable. On the third screen you'll see options to block online assistants, such as subscription pop-ups 1. These pop-ups are prevented by an 'annoyance filter' and AdGuard warns you that blocking them may violate a website's terms 2. If you turn this on, you'll need to confirm that AdGuard is not responsible for your compliance with a site's terms by clicking Enable 3 on the options that appear.



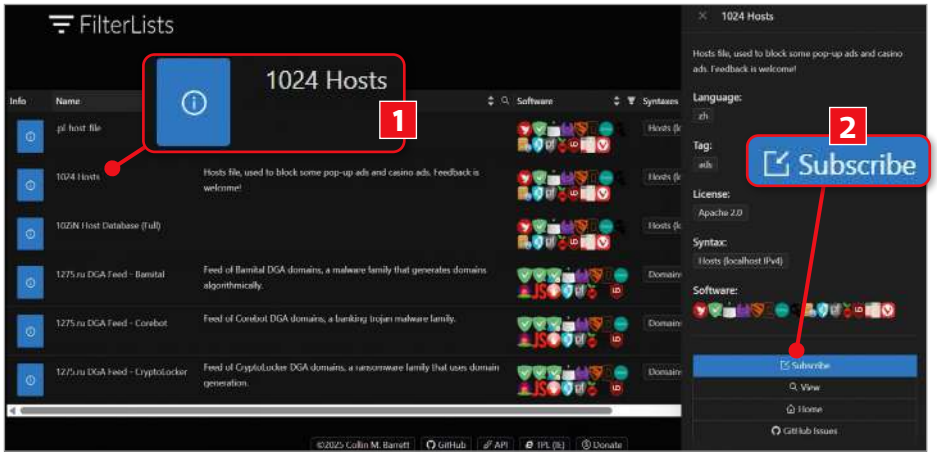
STEP 3 Click Proceed, then select a 'Privacy protection' level in the dropdown menu 1. If you need guidance, hover over the question mark 2 for a description of what each one does. 'Comfortable protection level' is the default, so leave this selected if you're not sure – you can change it later if necessary. Click Proceed, then decide whether you want access to fraudulent and infected websites restricted and to be notified about requests. Both of these are switched on by default and we'd recommend you leave them as they are.


Thanks for installing AdGuard Browser Assistant!
This companion browser extension for AdGuard desktop apps offers in-browser access to such features as custom element blocking, allowlisting websites, and submitting reports.
Every time you open a new tab, the add-on communicates with the standalone app and requests information about the current page status. In order to do that, it sends the current page's URL to the standalone app.
By installing this add-on, you agree to our Privacy Policy and Terms of Use.
Agree
Uninstall
Agree
1



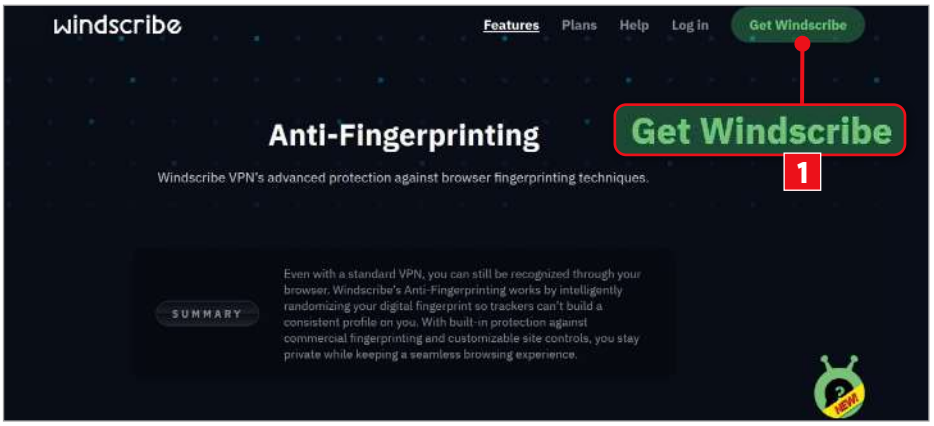
STEP 4 You can now add the AdGuard extension to your browser so you can manage filtering while browsing. Click 'Download the extension' and it will take you to the download page for your default browser. Install the extension, after which you'll need to agree to the privacy policy and terms of use – click Agree 1. Return to the AdGuard program and click through the final two screens of the process to complete the setup.

STEP 5 AdGuard lets you import rules you can use in addition to its default filters. These rules consist of addresses that, if matched, will be blocked so their content doesn't appear on your PC. Type chrome://extensions/ in your browser's address bar, and click Details 1 in the AdGuard AdBlocker box. Scroll down to 'Allow user scripts' and click the slider so it slides to the right. Now click the extensions icon at the top 2, followed by the three dots to the right of AdGuard AdBlocker 3, then 'AdGuard settings' 4.



STEP 6 You can find pre-compiled lists of resources you may want to block at sites like www.filterlists.com. We're going to use '1024 Hosts' from the site's first screen for our tests – it blocks some pop-up ads and casino sites. Click the blue button to the left of one that you want to use 1, then click Subscribe 2. An AdGuard message box will appear, offering to add the filter. Click Next, then tick the box beside Trusted and click Add. To delete the list later, click the red bin icon next to its name on the AdGuard page that opens once you've enabled it.

STEP 7 Finally, Windscribe VPN allows you to send up to 10GB of your data through its servers for free if you install its software and set up an account. It has recently introduced an anti-fingerprinting feature that obscures information such as lists of installed fonts, screen resolution and more. Some websites use this info instead of cookies to track you as you move around the web. Obscuring them can help protect your privacy. If you want to try it out, click Get Windscribe 1 at www.windscribe.com to get started.


windscribe
Features
Plans
Help
Log in
Get Windscribe
Anti-Fingerprinting
Windscribe VPN's advanced protection against browser fingerprinting techniques.
Get Windscribe
1
SUMMARY
Even with a standard VPN, you can still be recognized through your browser. Windscribe's Anti-Fingerprinting works by intelligently randomizing your digital fingerprint so trackers can't build a consistent profile on you. With built-in protection against commercial fingerprinting and customizable site controls, you stay private while keeping a seamless browsing experience.
NEW!

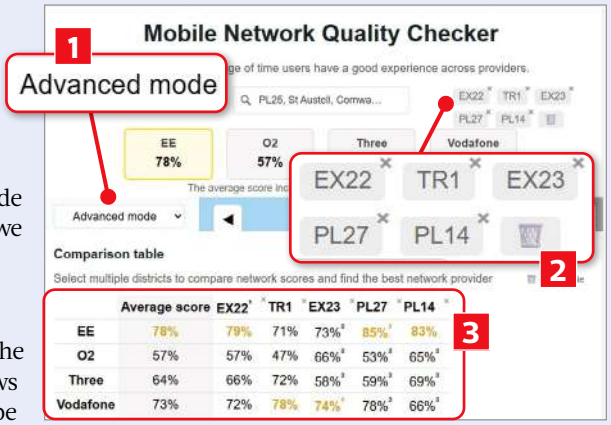
Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Compare mobile signals in different locations

The phone-signal checker from Which? that you mentioned in Issue 719 (page 7) has an excellent Advanced option that lets you compare signal strength across five locations. We used this recently to help us decide where to go on holiday, because we needed a reliable signal to stay in touch with vulnerable relatives.

Visit www.snipca.com/56267 then select 'Advanced mode' on the left (1 in our screenshot – it shows 'Basic mode' by default). Now type your postcode and choose your provider (or leave 'Best provider' selected). Type up to five postcodes and you'll see them appear to the right of the search box 2. Now click 'View comparison' and the comparison table will appear 3 showing the percentage scores for each postcode and provider. Clicking the bin icon removes all postcodes, resetting the map for a new search.



Jean Blackwell

Jean wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433

USB

Place sticks inside plastic bags with notes attached

Regarding Rod Grover's question about how to label USB sticks (Letters, Issue 719, page 13), my own solution is not to put anything on the actual stick. Instead I place each stick inside a small sealable plastic bags, and add a small Post-it note with the contents written on (pictured left). I also do this with the numerous USB receivers I've accumulated for various different bits of kit.

Alan Quinn

In reply to Rod Grover's question, I maintain an Apple Note (www.icloud.com/notes) on my phone which lists what's on each device, including which is the master copy and which is a backup. I title each device by size, colour, brand or whatever identifying feature they have. Where I have two sticks or hard drives that are identical, I place a small sticker on one creating its own identifying feature. This method helps index where everything is and is easily searchable across my iPhone, iPad, Macs and so on.

Roly Savage

EMAIL

Modify senders' names to confirm they're genuine

Often I used to forget to check whether email senders were genuine, by hovering my cursor over the name to see who the real senders were. So now, using Thunderbird (www.thunderbird.net) as my mail server, I save each genuine sender's name in the address book, but with the display name slightly edited – BloggsBank becomes BloggsBank-OK, so if an email arrives without the 'OK' I know to be on my guard. Bloggs Bank may sometimes send an email from a new address, but at least I'm reminded to check that it's genuine.

John Latimer

Why I stopped using...

My phone's SIM card

I don't intend to buy the iPhone Air (see review, page 22), but I applaud Apple for releasing a phone that is eSIM-only. I'm sure other phone manufacturers will follow suit.

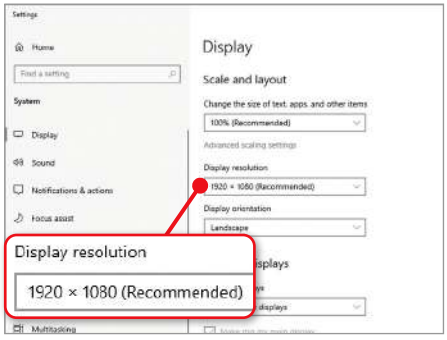
And what I use instead

I now hop between eSIM deals, trying to keep my payments under £5 a month. I started out with Mozillion (www.mozillion.com), which offered 3GB for a fiver, then moved to Spusu (www.spusu.co.uk), who offered 5GB for £4.50. But the absolute best I've seen is Lycamobile's 5GB for just £4 (www.lycamobile.co.uk). It does tie you into a 24-month contract, but I doubt anything cheaper will emerge during that time.

All this switching points to the main benefit of eSIMs. All it requires is a quick scan of a QR code. You don't have to fiddle with those infuriatingly small cards. The ease of switching is probably why there's such vibrant competition among companies, and why every time I check there seems to be a cheaper deal for the same data.

Del Harrison

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk



WINDOWS

Fix display settings to restore desktop icons

In Issue 719's Problems Solved (page 69) Peter Conway asked why his desktop icons are always clustered in the centre of the screen after starting up. Your answer suggested using PowerShell to delete files associated with Windows' icon cache, but I've got a simpler solution that I've used a few times. Right-click the desktop, then select 'Display settings' followed by 'Display resolution' and return it to the correct ('Recommended') settings (see screenshot above). When I do this, everything jumps back into place in a matter of seconds.

E Nott

SOFTWARE

Use WildRename to rename files

In Issue 719's Problems Solved (page 67), Carl Hughes asked how he could add an extra digit to the start of hundreds of file names. Your PowerToys suggestion is fine, but a much easier (and more versatile) option is to use WildRename from CyLog (www.snipca.com/56456). Development stopped in 2008, but it works in Windows 7, 10 and 11. It's small and portable, and has a 'Simulation mode' (see screenshot below) that shows a preview of changes before they are implemented.

Peter Lang

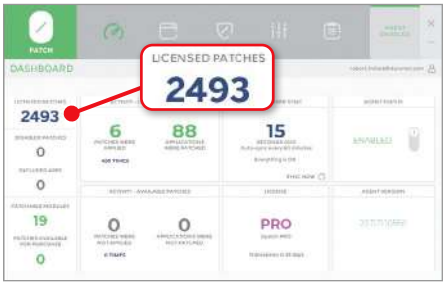
WINDOWS

Update Windows 10 using 0patch

A year ago, in anticipation of Microsoft ending support for Windows 10, I bought a subscription to 0patch (https://0patch.com). It's been running alongside Windows updates ever since, automatically syncing with the server every 60 minutes – and you don't even notice!

It has provided me with 2493 licensed patches (see screenshot below) in the past year, including for Office 2016 and 2019. I find Windows updates really annoying in comparison.

Robin Perry



Reader recommends...

Anker MagGo Power Bank

£50 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52909

In Issue 717's Readers' Tips, Roger Yeo said he stopped using Anker's power banks because they were being frequently recalled due to fire risk. I can't pretend the danger hasn't crossed my mind, but I've had no problems with the MagGo, which I bought in June to charge my iPhone wirelessly while on a camping holiday.

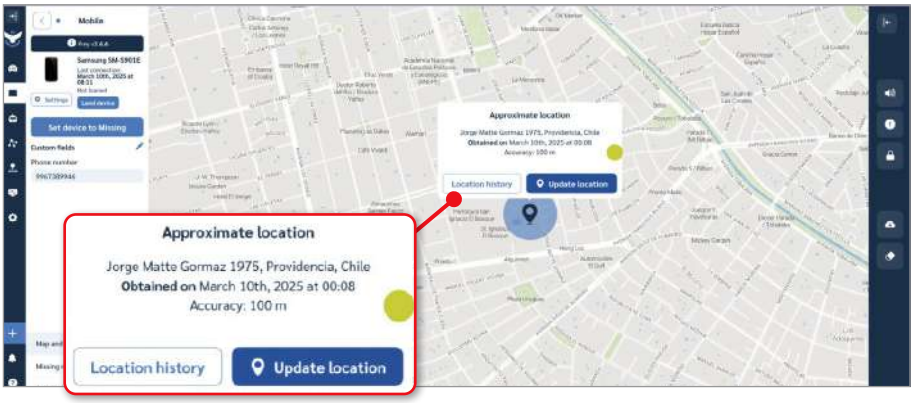
I had first thought about buying it in early 2025 after reading your positive review in Issue 699 (page 28), but £90 was a bit steep. I then spotted it on sale for just £50, and snapped it up.

It's very versatile. The USB-C port charges very quickly, but wireless charging is swift too – charging from about 50 per cent to full in under two hours.

The magnetic connection through Apple's MagSafe is reliable. It can withstand a few knocks without being disconnected. I also like the screen that shows you how much power the MagGo has left. That's reminded me a few times to replenish it.

Doug Cornish

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk



SECURITY

Get a photo of SIM-swap phone thieves

Your answer to Tim Baker's letter in Issue 719 (page 13) about preventing SIM-swap fraud isn't the whole picture, so to speak.

The excellent software Prey Project (https://preyproject.com, see screenshot above) not only tells you the phone number of the new SIM card that's been put in a stolen phone, but also tells you where that phone is and sends you a photo of the person using it.

You do have to set it as missing and it allows you to remotely wipe the phone. The free version allows up to three devices on your account (paid-for allows more). It also prevents a system wipe unless you have its password.

Paul Doust

VIVALDI

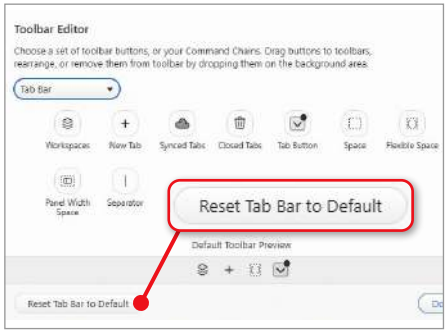
Customise the Tab Bar

Vivaldi 7.6, released in mid-September, introduces the new Tab Button we wrote about in Issue 719 (page 42) and a fully customisable Tab Bar. This lets you tailor the browser's top toolbar to include all the buttons you need.

Right-click any button on the Tab Bar (but an actual tab) and choose Customize Toolbar. Drag buttons from the Toolbar Editor to Vivaldi's Tab Bar to add them to it – options include Closed Tabs, Synced Tabs and Separator.

Rearrange the Tab Bar buttons by dragging them into position, then click Done. You can restore its default (four-button) appearance by clicking 'Reset Tab Bar to Default' (see screenshot below).

The Toolbar Editor can also customise Vivaldi's other toolbars, including the address bar and side panel.



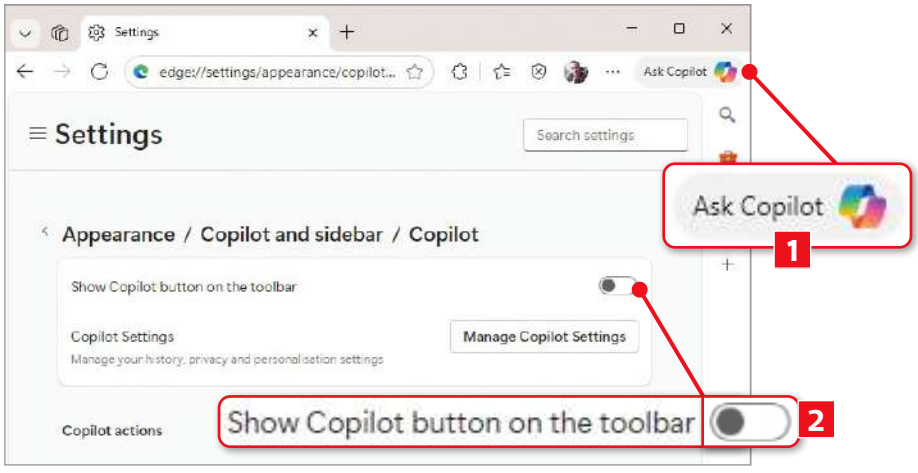
EDGE

Hide the new Ask Copilot button

Edge's new Copilot Mode (see Issue 717, page 42) adds an 'Ask Copilot' button to the top-right corner of the browser (1 in our screenshot below). This is larger than the Copilot button in Edge's standard mode – which just shows the AI tool's logo – and shifts other toolbar buttons further to the left.

Thankfully, it's possible to hide the new button if you find it annoying, though the option is tucked away. Click Edge's three-dot menu button and select Settings then Appearance. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click 'Copilot and sidebar'.

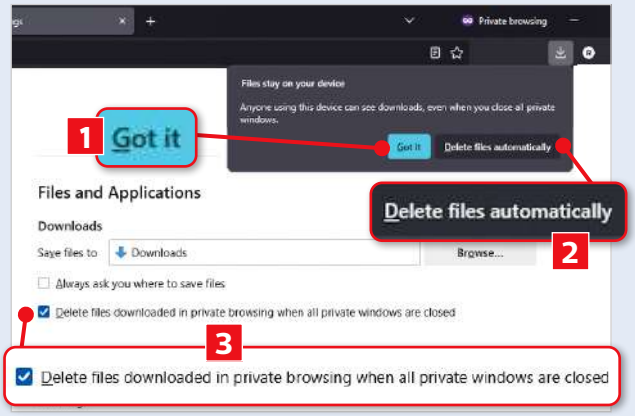
Select Copilot in the 'App specific settings' section and switch off 'Show Copilot button on the toolbar' 2. Disabling this setting also hides the Copilot button in standard browsing mode.



FIREFOX

Delete files you download in private mode

When you download a file in private or incognito mode, it's saved to your Downloads folder just like in standard browsing mode. This means anyone who uses your PC can see what you've downloaded.



Firefox 143, released in September, addresses this privacy concern by offering to delete files you download in private mode as soon as all private windows are closed. When you click a download link, it displays a warning that 'Files stay on your device'.

Click 'Got it' (1 in our screenshot) if you want to keep the file in your Downloads folder, or 'Delete files automatically' 2 to permanently delete the item when you leave private mode. This bypasses the recycle bin so no one can retrieve the file from there.

To always delete private files without being prompted, click the browser's three-line menu button and choose Settings then General. Scroll down to the 'Files and Applications' section and select 'Delete files downloaded in private browsing when all private windows are closed' 3.

DUCKDUCKGO

Switch between search and AI

DuckDuckGo has updated its browser to let you easily switch between searching the web privately with its search engine and chatting privately to its AI assistant, Duck.ai. On the browser's homepage, either click the Search tab (1 in our screenshot above) to enter a search query or click the Duck.ai tab 2 to start a conversation with the chatbot. As ever with DuckDuckGo, nothing you type will be shared with third parties or used to track you and target you with ads.

If you'd prefer not to have Duck.ai on the browser's homepage, you can remove the new tab. To do so, click the Customize button in the bottom-right corner and select Search Only.

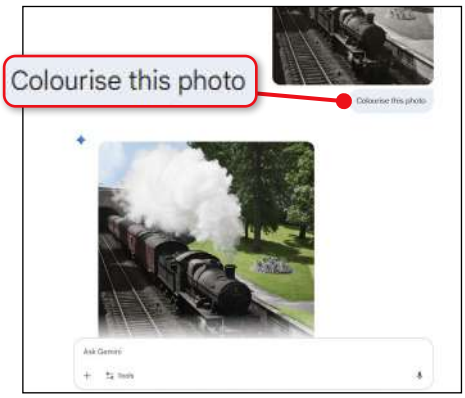
GEMINI

Colourise your old photos

One of the most useful features introduced by Gemini's new Flash 2.5 Image model (aka Nano Banana – see Issue 719, page 43) is the ability to colourise old black-and-white photos. This is available to all Gemini users and images can be up to 100MB in size – the free plan lets you edit 100 per day.

Upload a black-and-white picture to the Gemini website or mobile app and ask it to 'Colourise this photo' (see screenshot below). It will transform the image in a few seconds, and you can then download or share the colourised result.

Unlike most free online converters, Gemini lets you save photos at their original size. It add its watermark symbol to the bottom-right corner, but this isn't too obtrusive.



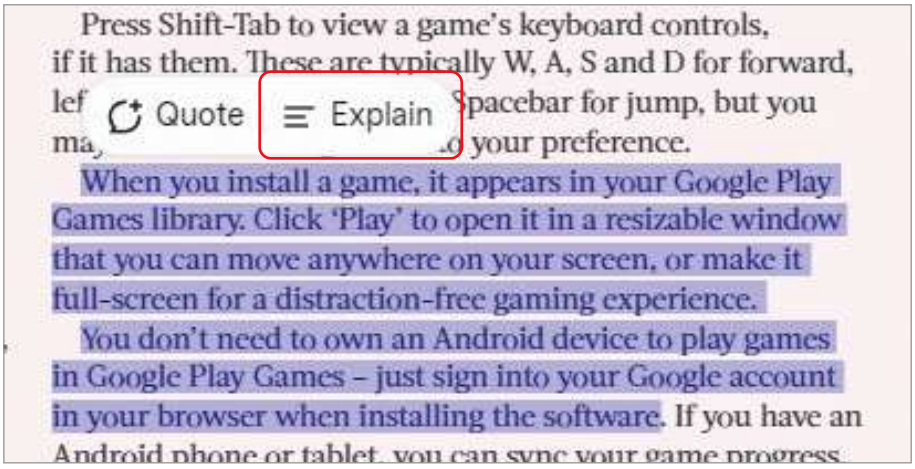
GROK

Explain sections of PDFs

Grok can now explain specific sections of PDFs, as well as summarise their content. This lets you clarify jargon and complex information simply by selecting the relevant text, rather than by asking questions.

To try the feature, click the Attach button below the message box on the Grok website (it's not available in the mobile app), select 'Upload a file' and choose a PDF. Once Grok has provided a summary, click the uploaded file to open it in a PDF viewer on the right.

Highlight the text you want Grok to explain and click the Explain option that pops up (see screenshot below). An explanation of the PDF excerpt will then appear in your chat. You can also choose Quote to include the highlighted section in your conversation.


Press Shift-Tab to view a game's keyboard controls,
if it has them. These are typically W, A, S and D for forward,
lef
Quote
Explain
Spacebar for jump, but you
ma
your preference.
When you install a game, it appears in your Google Play Games library. Click 'Play' to open it in a resizable window that you can move anywhere on your screen, or make it full-screen for a distraction-free gaming experience.
You don't need to own an Android device to play games in Google Play Games – just sign into your Google account in your browser when installing the software. If you have an
Android phone or tablet, you can sync your game progress

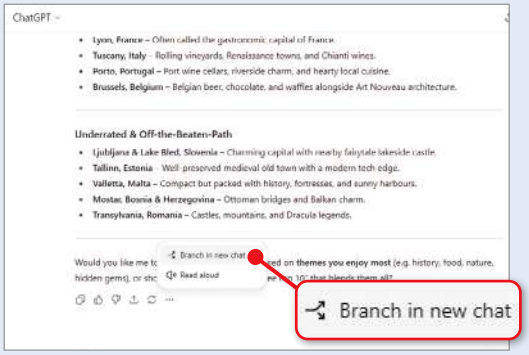
CHATGPT

Branch out from your conversations

ChatGPT has added the useful option to 'branch' your conversations. This allows you to take your chats with the AI assistant in different directions without losing the original threads.

For example, when you ask ChatGPT for travel advice and want more information about a destination that it recommends, you can branch off the chat into a new one. This will let you discuss that place in detail, without losing track of its other recommendations.

To branch a conversation, click the three-dot 'More actions' icon below ChatGPT's last response and select 'Branch in new chat' (see screenshot). This will duplicate the chat in a new window, where you can continue asking questions.

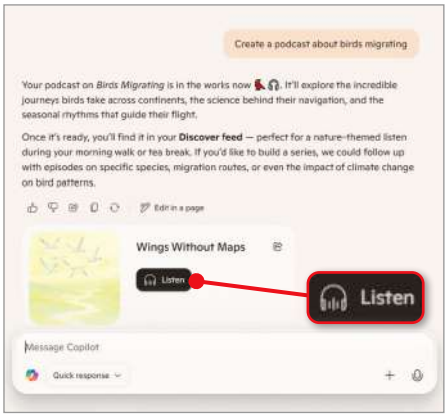

ChatGPT
Lyon, France – Often called the gastronomic capital of France.
Tuscany, Italy – Rolling vineyards, Renaissance towns, and Chianti wines.
Porto, Portugal – Port wine cellars, riverside charm, and hearty local cuisine.
Brussels, Belgium – Belgian beer, chocolate, and waffles alongside Art Nouveau architecture.
Underrated & Off-the-Beaten-Path
Ljubljana & Lake Bled, Slovenia – Charming capital with nearby fairytale lakeside castle.
Tallinn, Estonia – Well-preserved medieval old town with a modern tech edge.
Valletta, Malta – Compact but packed with history, fortresses, and sunny harbours.
Mostar, Bosnia & Herzegovina – Ottoman bridges and Balkan charm.
Transylvania, Romania – Castles, mountains, and Dracula legends.
Would you like me to
Branch in new chat
Read aloud
ed on themes you enjoy most (e.g. history, food, nature,
Branch in new chat

ChatGPT names your branched chats 'Branch · [name of original chat]', but you can rename them to make them easier to find in your chat history. The new feature is available to all ChatGPT users through its website, but not its mobile apps.

COPILOT

Create your own podcasts

Rather than read Copilot's information about a particular subject, you can now listen to it by generating a podcast. Ask the chatbot to create a podcast on any topic of your choice, and it will source the relevant details and turn them into a narrated audio file.


Create a podcast about birds migrating
Your podcast on Birds Migrating is in the works now. It'll explore the incredible journeys birds take across continents, the science behind their navigation, and the seasonal rhythms that guide their flight.
Once it's ready, you'll find it in your Discover feed — perfect for a nature-themed listen during your morning walk or tea break. If you'd like to build a series, we could follow up with episodes on specific species, migration routes, or even the impact of climate change on bird patterns.
Edit in a page
Wings Without Maps
Listen
Listen
Message Copilot
Quick response

This takes up to five minutes per request and the finished podcast episode will appear in your Discover feed. Copilot will notify you when it's ready. Click Listen (see screenshot above) to hear the result, and the Share button to share a link to your podcast with other people.

Episodes last up to 10 minutes and use a female English voice to deliver the information. The podcast feature is available in the web version of Copilot and in its apps for Android and iOS.

Phone and Tablet Tips

iOS

Filter messages from unknown senders

In our 'Block all spam calls' Cover Feature in Issue 709 (buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/56069) we complained about the "meagre protection against unsolicited texts" in the Messages app for iPhone and iPad. Apple must have listened, because iOS 26 improves how the app deals with messages from unknown senders.

A new Screen Unknown Senders feature automatically filters messages from numbers that aren't in your Contacts to an Unknown Senders folder. You can access this in the app's top-right menu (see screenshot 1 below).

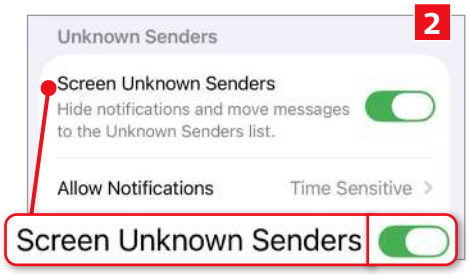
If a message is from a legitimate source, tap 'Mark as Known' to move it to your main conversation list. Any future messages from that number won't be filtered.

The new option is disabled by default, unless you previously enabled Filter Unknown Senders (the older, less effective version of the feature).

To turn it on, tap Filters in the Messages app and choose Manage Filtering. Scroll down to Unknown Senders and switch on Screen Unknown Senders (screenshot 2 below left).

You won't receive a notification when a message from an unknown sender arrives, unless it's deemed time-sensitive – ie, messages containing verification codes, alerts and urgent requests.

Another new option in the Messages app lets you customise the background of your conversations. Tap the name of the person or group in the chat header and select Backgrounds. Choose from options including Sky, Water and Aurora, or use one of your own photos. People you chat to will also see this background.

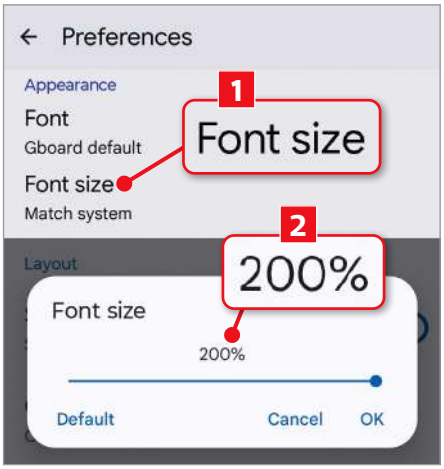


ANDROID

Enlarge the font size on the Gboard keyboard

Google has added a new option to Gboard (www.snipca.com/56435), the built-in keyboard on Android devices, which enlarges the font size of characters on its keys. This makes letters, numbers and punctuation marks easier to read and reduces the risk of pressing the wrong key.

To change the font size, open the Gboard keyboard by pressing a text box in a supported app such as Gmail, Messages or Chrome. Tap the Settings cog on the top toolbar – if you don't see this, tap the 'Open features menu' icon, which looks like a square comprising four smaller squares, then choose Settings.



Select 'Preferences' and tap the new 'Font size' option (1 in our screenshot above). By default, this is set to 'Match system', but by dragging the slider below you can increase the font size to your preference – up to 200-per-cent larger 2. Tap 'Default' to restore the original font size.

ANDROID & iOS

Play Spotify music in lossless quality

You can now listen to music on Spotify in lossless audio quality,

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

Instagram for iPad

Free

iOS www.snipca.com/56439

Meta has finally introduced an Instagram app for iPads, 15 years after the iPhone version was released. As well as showing larger versions of photos and videos, the new app includes a Following tab not yet available in other versions. This lets you switch between viewing posts from all the accounts you follow or just your friends.

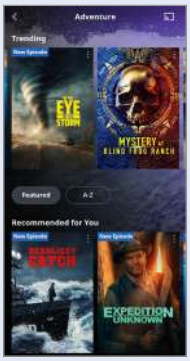
Discovery+

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/56444

iOS www.snipca.com/56445

Discovery+ has redesigned its mobile app (and TV app) to make it easier to find shows and sport to watch live and on-demand. Browse categories such as Lifestyle, Crime and Adventure; view larger images and more information for each programme; and see thumbnail previews when fast-forwarding. A subscription costs £3.99 a month.



Doggy Cleaner

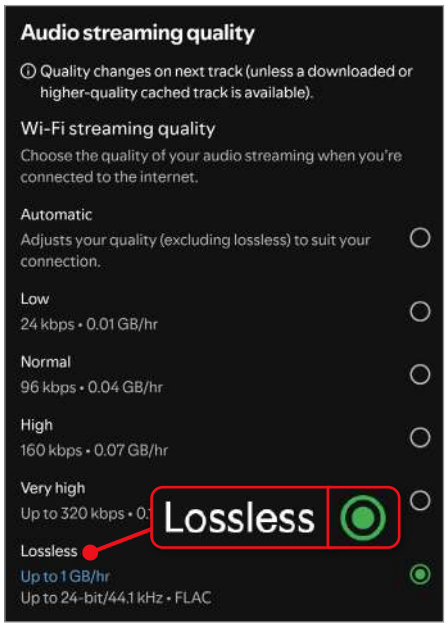
Free*

Android www.snipca.com/56448

iOS www.snipca.com/56449

Doggy Cleaner frees up space on your phone or tablet by detecting and deleting similar and duplicate photos. It automatically selects one version of each, so you can wipe the rest in one tap. The app also removes screenshots, and very short and very large videos. Deleting your first 50 items is free, after which it costs £3.49 a month.

*Contains in-app purchases


Audio streaming quality
Quality changes on next track (unless a downloaded or higher-quality cached track is available).
Wi-Fi streaming quality
Choose the quality of your audio streaming when you're connected to the internet.
Automatic
Adjusts your quality (excluding lossless) to suit your connection.
Low
24 kbps • 0.01 GB/hr
Normal
96 kbps • 0.04 GB/hr
High
160 kbps • 0.07 GB/hr
Very high
Up to 320 kbps • 0.
Lossless
Lossless
Up to 1 GB/hr
Up to 24-bit/44.1 kHz • FLAC

which the streaming service says was one of its "most anticipated features" (www.snipca.com/56442). This allows you to play tracks in uncompressed FLAC format (24bit/44.1kHz to be precise) and enjoy richer, more detailed sound across "nearly every song" in the Spotify library.

However, there are a couple of catches. The new option is only available to Spotify Premium subscribers, and requires you to use wired headphones or speakers. Bluetooth doesn't provide enough bandwidth to transmit lossless audio.

To activate the feature, tap your profile icon in the top-left corner of the Spotify app and choose 'Settings and privacy' followed by 'Media quality'. In the 'Wi-Fi streaming quality' section, select Lossless (see screenshot above) and tap 'Turn on lossless'. Because streaming lossless tracks uses a lot of data – up to 1GB per hour – it's not advisable to do so over 4G or 5G by enabling Lossless under 'Cellular streaming quality'.

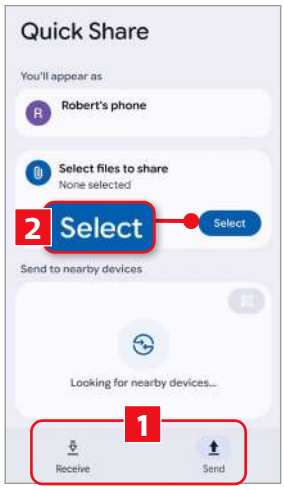
You can also download songs in lossless quality by selecting the option under 'Audio download quality'. Be aware that uncompressed files will take up a lot of space on your phone or tablet.

ANDROID

Send and receive files more easily

The Quick Share feature on Android phones and tablets lets you send files to nearby devices over Bluetooth, Wi-Fi or your mobile network (see Issue 712, page 44). Google has now redesigned the tool to make sharing files even easier, and upgraded Quick Share from a pop-up panel to a full-screen, more app-like layout.

The new design includes Send and Receive tabs (1 in our screenshot right). Tap 'Select' 2 on the Send tab to choose the files you want to share, and Quick Send will detect other devices that have the feature enabled. Select one to share the file – or the other person can scan the QR code provided.



The Receive tab shows the names of devices that are trying to share files with you. You'll receive a notification asking you to accept or decline the transfer. If both devices are signed into the same Google account, files will be accepted automatically.

To access Quick Share, swipe down from the top of your screen and choose the option in the Quick Settings tray. Or tap the Share option within an app and select Quick Share there.

BEST APPS FOR... Monitoring your device's battery

AccuBattery

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/56450

AccuBattery provides a wealth of useful information about your phone or tablet's battery. It analyses its capacity and health to tell you how long it will last on its current charge; the impact (in 'wear cycles') of charging your mobile device by different percentages; and your usage patterns, which you can keep track of over time.

Best For Checking battery health

Charge Meter

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/56451

Charge Meter provides an overview of your device's battery when charging and discharged, including its voltage, temperature and power. It's particularly handy for comparing the efficiency of different chargers, so you know which one is the fastest. Upgrade to Premium to remove ads and unlock widgets and battery-charging reminders.

Best For Comparing phone chargers

Battery HD+

Free*

iOS www.snipca.com/56452

Apple limits how much battery data third-party apps can access, but this one does a great job of presenting that information, including the time left until the next charge is required. Use its calibrate feature to see how long your iPhone or iPad battery will last when performing specific tasks such as web browsing and video streaming.

Best For Estimating charge times

*Contains in-app purchases

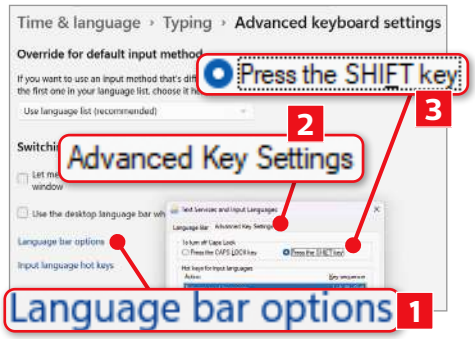
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Disable a stuck Caps Lock using Shift

If your Caps Lock key is stuck into typing capital letters, you can disable it by pressing Shift.

In Windows 10, right-click the Start menu then select 'Time & Language' followed by Language. Next, scroll down and select 'Spelling, typing, & keyboard settings' followed by 'Advanced keyboard settings'. Now click 'Language bar options' to open the 'Text Services and Input Languages' box, then click the Advanced Key Settings tab and select 'Press the SHIFT key'. Click OK to confirm.

In Windows 11, open 'Time & language' then click Typing. Next, click 'Advanced keyboard settings' followed by 'Language bar options' (1 in our screenshot below). Now click Advanced Key Settings 2 and select 'Press the SHIFT key' 3. Click OK.



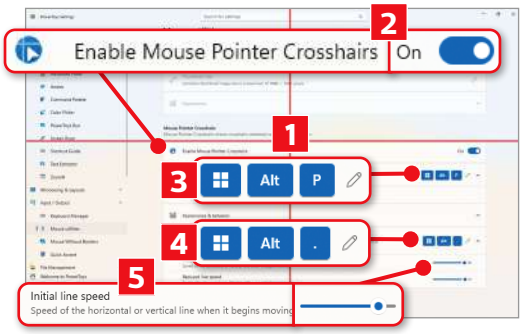
WINDOWS 10 & 11

'Glide' your cursor in PowerToys

The 'Mouse Pointer Crosshairs' feature in PowerToys highlights your screen cursor using red crosshairs, making it easier to spot (1 in our screenshot below – the cursor is missing from our screenshot). Version 0.94 of PowerToys, released in August, added a 'Gliding cursor' option that lets you move the cursor (and the crosshairs) across the screen with a keyboard shortcut, so you can place it precisely where you want it. This makes it a useful accessibility tool for people who struggle to use a mouse.

Open PowerToys then click Input/Output on the left followed by 'Mouse utilities'. Now scroll down the central pane and turn on Enable Mouse Pointer Crosshairs 2. Next, press your keyboard shortcut to turn on the crosshairs (by default this is Windows key+Alt+P 3).

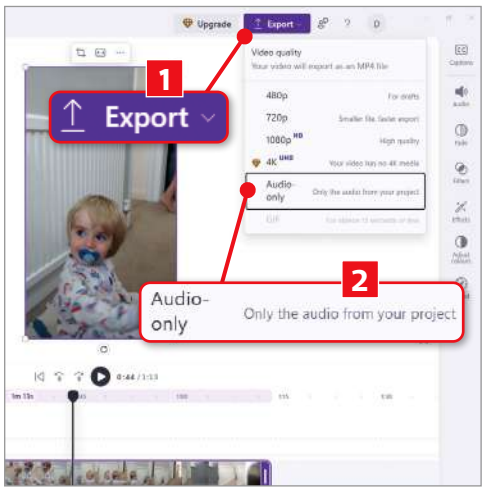
Now scroll down and you'll see the shortcut for 'Gliding cursor' (by default it's Windows key+Alt+. (full stop) 4. Press this and your cursor will glide horizontally across your screen. Press it again and it'll glide vertically. Press it a third time and it'll stop. If it moves too quickly or slowly, click the 'Gliding cursor' arrow to the right of the shortcut and move the sliders to change its speed 5.



WINDOWS 10 & 11

Export only the audio from Clipchamp videos

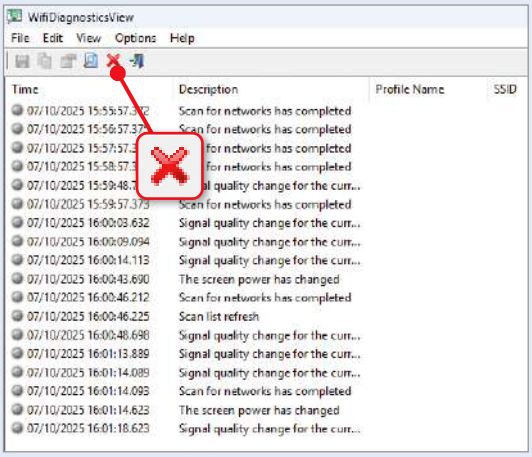
Microsoft's video-editing tool Clipchamp lets you export only the audio from a video.



Import the video then click the top-right Export button (1 in our screenshot above) followed by 'Audio-only' 2. You'll now need to decide where to save the audio file. The default is OneDrive, so you'll have to click the purple 'Save to your computer' button at the top right to save it locally on your machine. There are also options to save it to Google Drive and Dropbox. Files are saved in the MPEG-4 format.

WINDOWS 10 & 11

Quickly remove all Wi-Fi items from NirSoft tool



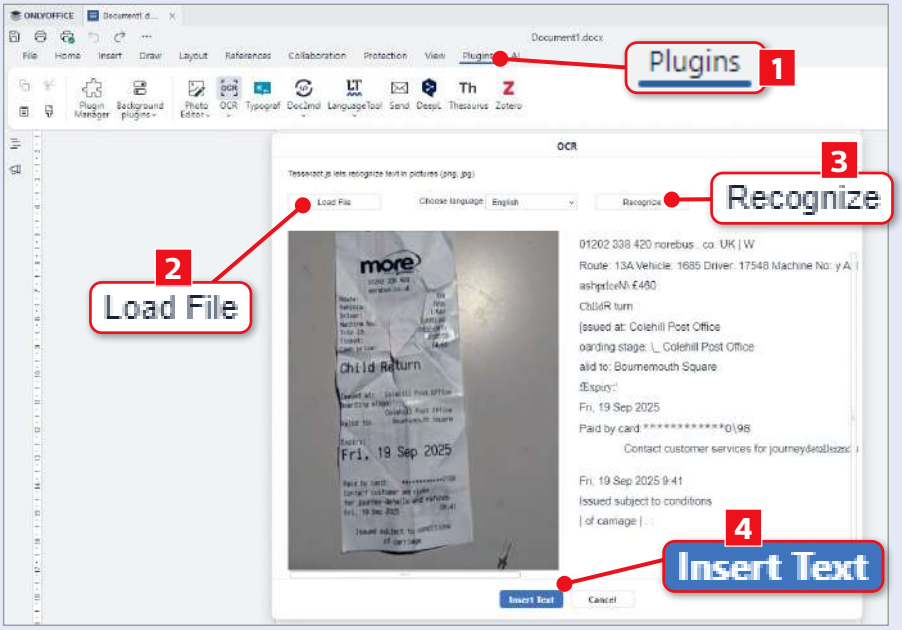
Released in 2022, NirSoft's WifiDiagnosticsView is an effective way to diagnose Wi-Fi problems. It monitors your Wi-Fi adapter for changes and tells you exactly when they occurred. These include instances when it scans for available networks; when it connects to and disconnects from an access point; when it's subject to a change in signal quality and other significant events. When a failure is detected, it shows an error code and description, so you can search online for a fix.

Version 1.8, released on 1 October, adds a 'Clear All Items' icon (see screenshot) to the toolbar, making it easy to quickly remove all the details below. This is handy if you need to pinpoint a problem but find the details overwhelming. You can also clear all items by pressing Ctrl+X.

To download WifiDiagnosticsView, visit www.snipca.com/56581 then scroll down to the Feedback heading and click the download link below. It's safe to run, so if Windows warns you about it, click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

ONLYOFFICE

Extract text in OnlyOffice using OCR



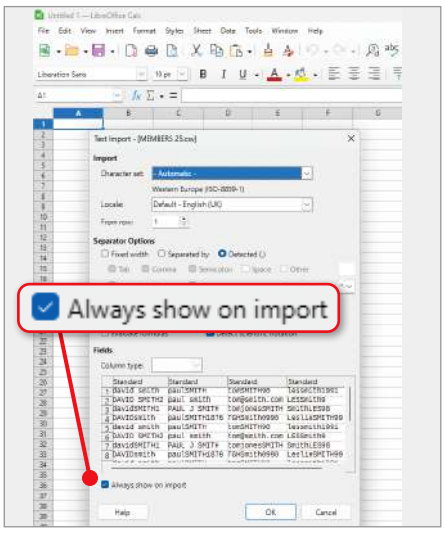
OnlyOffice has an OCR (optical character recognition) plug-in for extracting text from photos, images and screenshots and putting it into documents. It's part of OnlyOffice by default, so you don't need to install it through the Plugin Manager.

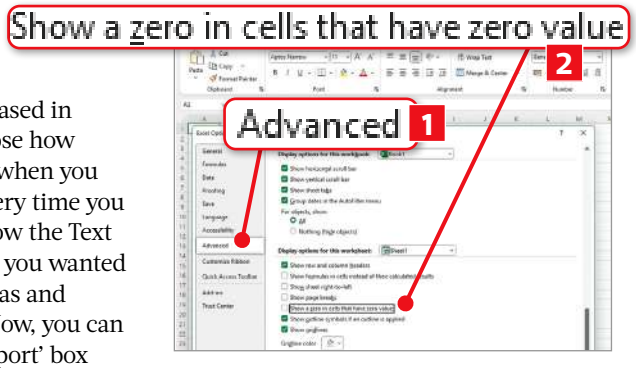
Open a document then click Plugins at the top. Now click the OCR icon that appears in the plugins toolbar (1 in our screenshot), followed by Load File 2. Navigate to the photo, image or screenshot you want to extract text from, then double-click it. It will now appear in the OCR box. Click 'Recognize' 3 and the extracted text will appear on the right. Finally, click Insert Text 4 and the text will appear in your document, ready for you to edit. The plugin isn't perfect, with some erratic formatting. But it's still a quick and effective way in OnlyOffice to extract text.

LIBREOFFICE CALC

Choose how to open imported CSV files

LibreOffice 25.8, released in August, lets you choose how Calc opens CSV files when you import them. Previously, every time you opened a file Calc would show the Text Import box, asking whether you wanted to set separators (like commas and semicolons) and columns. Now, you can tick the 'Always show on import' box (see screenshot below) to always see the options for setting separators and columns. If you leave it unticked, Calc will remember your previous choices.





MICROSOFT EXCEL

Show cells containing zeroes as blanks

By default, Excel shows zeroes in cells when you choose 0 as a value, but you can choose instead to show these cells as blank. Click 'File' at the top left followed by Options at the bottom then Advanced on the left (1 in our screenshot above). Now scroll down to the Display options and untick the box next to 'Show a zero in cells that have zero value' 2. This applies only to the spreadsheet you have open, not the whole of Excel.

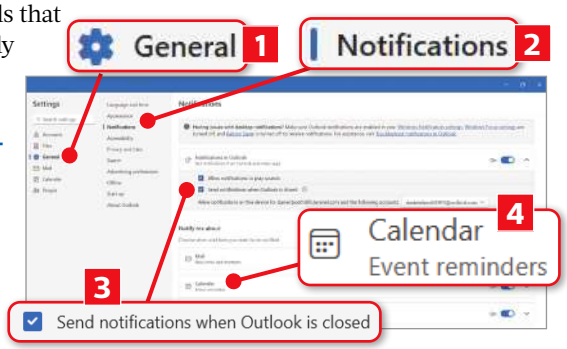
OUTLOOK

Show calendar alerts even when Outlook is closed

If you subscribe to Microsoft 365 and have the new version of Outlook turned on, you can ask it to show notifications for events in your calendar even when you haven't got Outlook open. First, open Settings in Windows 11, then click System followed by Notifications. Now turn on 'Show notification banners' and 'Show notifications on the lock screen'.

Next, also within Windows 11's Settings, select Apps then 'Installed apps'. Now scroll down and find 'Outlook for Windows' then click the three dots at the far right. Choose 'Advanced options' then select Always in the 'Let this app run in background' dropdown menu.

Finally, open Outlook then click the cog at the top right. Now click General (1 in our screenshot below) on the left followed by Notifications 2 and tick 'Send notifications when Outlook is closed' 3. Make sure 'Calendar event reminders' is turned on too 4. Click 'Save' at the bottom to confirm.



In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Plan club events with Google Keep

Whether you're holding an AGM, a big fundraiser or a Christmas party, planning an event can be tough, even if you have plenty of willing members to help you. You could use a group WhatsApp chat to keep everyone involved in the loop, delegate tasks and so on. But group chats tend to get messy very quickly – messages stack up, jobs get buried under emojis and before long you'll find yourself scrolling back through hundreds of unread posts to find out whether anyone actually booked the venue you need.

A better approach is to use a tool that's expressly designed for keeping track of tasks and sharing them with others, such as Google Keep. It lets you and selected club members create and collaborate on shared notes and checklists for every aspect of your event – from shopping lists and rotas to schedules, venue details and more. Everyone can see the latest version of the plan in one place, add useful notes themselves and follow progress as the event begins to take shape. Google Keep is free, easy to use and available on any device.

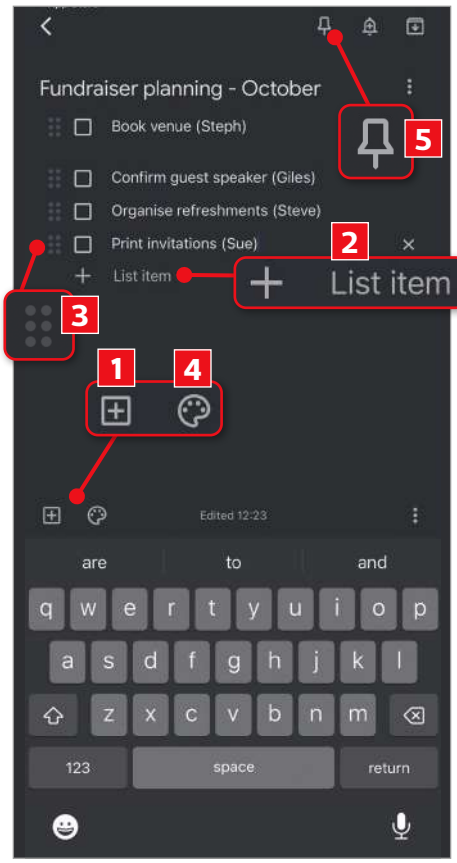
To help with your event planning, we're going to show you how to create a shareable note with a checklist of organisational tasks that need to be completed by your members.

Set up a task list for your event

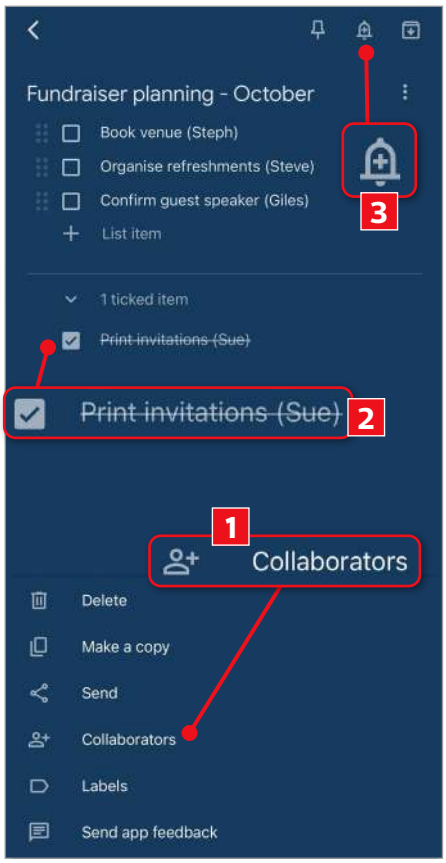
Before you begin, all the members helping out with your event will need access to Google Keep, either by installing the mobile app on their Android device (www.snipca.com/56577) or iPhone (www.snipca.com/56578), or by visiting https://keep.google.com in their PC browser.

They'll also need to sign in with a Google account – it's free to set up if they don't already have one (see www.snipca.com/56580). Here, we'll explain the process using the Google Keep mobile app, but the steps are similar if you're using the browser version.

Launch the app and tap the multicoloured plus sign (+) icon. Where it says Title, type a name for your note



Create a list of tasks, then colour-code and pin them as required



Tap 'Collaborators' to add the email addresses of members you want to share the tasklist with

('Fundraiser planning', for example). Tap the grey plus sign (+) on the left (1 in our screenshot above) then select 'Tick boxes' in the options that appear.

Now tap 'List item' 2 and type a task for your to-do list (book venue, arrange refreshments and so on). You can now assign a name to each item, if you know which members will be responsible for each task. Tap 'List item' again after typing each task to add a new item, until your checklist is complete.

You can reorder items on your list by long-pressing the icon to the left of the tickbox 3 and dragging it up or down. If you'd like to colour-code your checklist, tap the palette icon 4 and select the colour you want. Finally, tap the pin icon 5 to pin your task list to the top of your Keep board, so it's easy to keep track of everyone's progress.

Share your task list with members

To share your task list, open it and tap the More (three vertical dots) icon, then select Collaborators (1 in our screenshot above). Add the email address of each member you want to share the list with, then tap the tick icon when you're done. Each person will receive an email invitation. Once they've accepted, your shared note will appear on their own Keep board, where they will be able to view your checklist, tick items off, and add further tasks, notes or suggestions.

Tapping the tickbox next to a task will take the item off the list and move it to the bottom of the note with a strikethrough to signify that the task has been completed 2. To keep an eye on the progress of your task list, tap the bell icon 3 to set reminders.

Next issue: Schedule group calls in WhatsApp

What's All the

Fuss About...

Sideloading

Google is tightening its rules on installing apps from outside the Play Store

What is it?

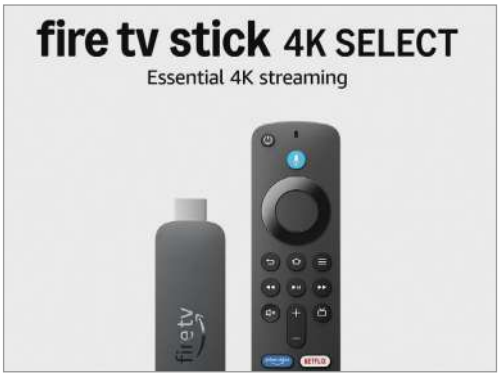
It's the process of installing apps from independent sources, outside of your device's official app store. If you use an iPhone or iPad you may not be familiar with this concept, because it's something Apple flatly refuses to allow. And it's one of the reasons many users prefer Android, which has always taken a much more open, flexible approach, allowing users to freely install any app they want. Until now.

What's changing?

Google will soon require anyone who develops Android apps to verify their identity with Google, even if they make their apps available outside of the Play Store. When the new system is introduced, your Android device will check to see whether the developer of an app you attempt to sideload on to your device is verified. If the app fails to meet Google's requirements, you could be prevented from installing it (see screenshot right).

Why is this happening?

In a recent Android Developer Blog post (www.snipca.com/56607), Google explained the move is designed to prevent criminals and hackers from distributing malware and scam apps. But some developers and users see it as a subtle shift by Google to lock down Android, losing the main advantage it has always enjoyed over Apple's iOS.



You can't sideload illegal streaming apps on Amazon's new Fire TV Stick

Won't it just make sideloading safer?

That's certainly the way Google is pitching it. But it could seriously restrict freedom of choice. For one thing, not every developer will want to sign up for Google's verification process. Independent developers, hobbyists and open-source contributors may be reluctant to hand over personal details or tie themselves to Google's rules. And if the verification process requires any kind of fee (which Google hasn't ruled out), it could further discourage smaller creators from releasing apps.

It also raises questions about the future of legitimate third-party app stores such as F-Droid, which recently voiced its concerns about Google's plans (www.snipca.com/56614).

When's this being introduced?

Google has already started inviting selected developers to sign up for verification and, from March 2026, the verification process will open to everyone. From September next year, rules will come into effect blocking apps from unverified developers on Android devices in Brazil, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. Google says it expects to roll out the system worldwide from 2027 onwards.

So, is this the end for sideloading?

Google claims that "developers will have the same freedom to distribute their apps directly to users through sideloading". But it's hard not to feel that the groundwork is being laid for Android to be more tightly controlled. And it's not just Google – another tech giant is cracking down.

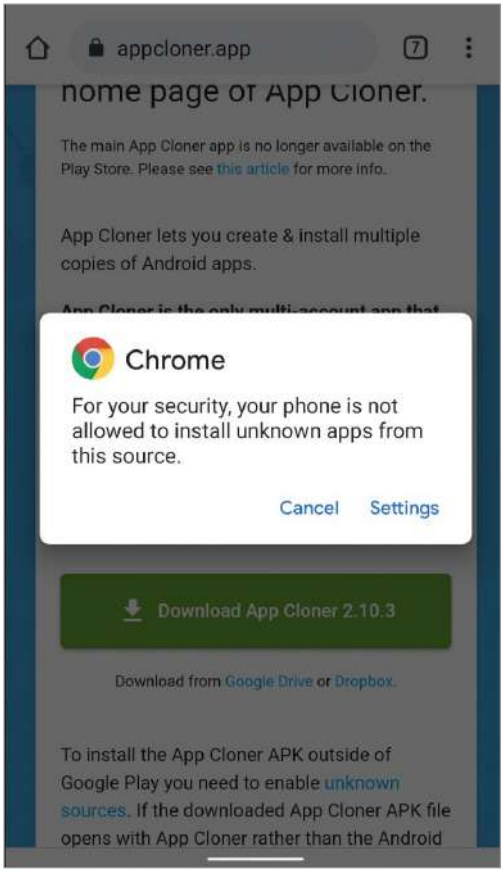
Which one?

Amazon. Its new Fire TV Stick 4K Select (£50 from www.snipca.com/56619, pictured below left) ditches its Android-based Fire OS in favour of a new Linux-based operating system, Vega OS (see page 8). This means sideloadable Android apps won't work with it.

Not only that, but the Fire TV Stick 4K Select's product page also states that "only apps from the Amazon Appstore on Fire TV are available for download," suggesting the new model may block sideloading altogether.

Streaming services will be pleased, as this could help to prevent criminals from hacking the Fire TV Stick 4K Select and modifying it to provide access to pirated content, such as Premier League football and movies, via unauthorised apps. But, for most users, it just means less freedom to customise their device.

Previous Fire TV models remain unaffected, and Amazon has confirmed it will continue to support Fire OS on these devices – for now.


appcloner.app
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The main App Cloner app is no longer available on the Play Store. Please see this article for more info.
App Cloner lets you create & install multiple copies of Android apps.
Chrome
For your security, your phone is not allowed to install unknown apps from this source.
Cancel
Settings
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Download from Google Drive or Dropbox.
To install the App Cloner APK outside of Google Play you need to enable unknown sources. If the downloaded App Cloner APK file opens with App Cloner rather than the Android

SOFTWARE • APPS • TV SHOWS • CLASSIC FILMS • YOUTUBE • VIDEO EDITING • ONLINE STORAGE • SCREEN RECORDING • RAKUTEN TV • PDF TOOLS • SPOTIFY • DISNEY+ • TUBI • IMAGE GENERATION • STREAMING • ADOBE • AI BROWSERS • CHATGPT FOLDERS • PLUTO TV • TRANSFER FILES • AFFINITY • PODCASTS • GOOGLE GEMINI • PLEX
FREE
AT LAST!

Prices seem to be rising everywhere and the golden age of online freebies has passed, but if you look carefully you can still find goodies you previously had to pay for. Daniel Booth reveals what's become free this year...

We think you can break the internet era into three rough phases. First, for a few years in the mid-to-late 1990s, it seemed that most online content would always be free. That utopian vision didn't last long as media companies and the early tech giants quickly realised how much money could be made.

Thus began the second period, where companies often launched paid-for services, only to later make them free to attract more customers as they developed other money-making schemes. This lasted many years and gave us loads of superb free software and services, but it started to fade around 2018-19, led by TV-streaming firms seeking to maximise their profits.

Then came the Covid lockdowns and increased public reliance on digital services. As inflation soared, companies started to squeeze customers for every penny they could get – charging to avoid ads, share passwords, work across multiple devices and so on.

We're firmly stuck in this third phase, but there are hopeful signs. AI companies urgently need to grab users and are racing to make paid-for tools free for everyone. Feeling threatened, older firms have made apps and advanced options free.

We present the evidence here, with the 20 best programs, apps, films, TV shows and more that have become free in the past 12 months. It's not quite a new golden age, but at least some companies are giving something back instead of dreaming up yet another way to fleece you. You'll see how much money we saved on page 57.

WHAT YOU CAN *NOW* DO FOR FREE

- Edit iPhone videos on Adobe Premiere
- Open multiple PDFs in tabs in SoftMaker's PDF tool
- Watch Disney+ shows on ITVX
- Stream your Plex content across your home network
- Organise your ChatGPT conversations into 'Projects'

VIDEO, MUSIC & PODCASTS

1 Edit iPhone videos on Adobe Premiere

www.snipca.com/56482

Adobe's new Premiere mobile app brings proper video editing to your iPhone for free. Features that used to cost $9.99 (around £7.40) a month in the now-discontinued Premiere Rush – such as multi-track timelines (see screenshot below); 4K HDR exports; unlimited video and audio layers; and royalty-free stock clips – are now included.

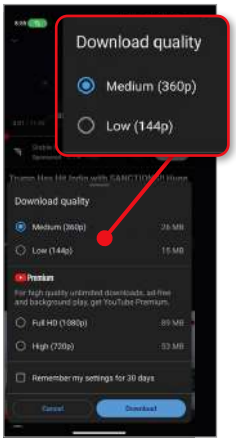
Adobe's Premiere app offers plenty of advanced video-editing tools, including multi-track editing

Not everything is free – you'll need to pay to go beyond 2GB storage, or to use Adobe's Firefly AI tool to generate images, create sound effects and more. However, you don't need to pay to remove adverts because... there *are* no adverts! Watch Adobe's video for help using it: www.snipca.com/56483. An Android version is coming soon.

2 Download videos from YouTube

www.youtube.com

You can now download videos from YouTube's app to watch later offline, but only in Low (144p) and Medium (360p) video quality. To watch offline in High (720p) or Full HD (1080p) you'll still need a YouTube Premium subscription (£12.99 a month). Also, you can't download music videos for free in any quality. Still, it's better than nothing.

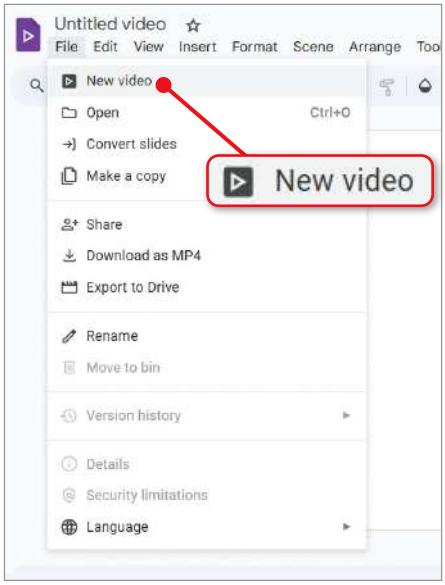


You can now download videos for free in YouTube's app, but only in Low and Medium quality

3 Edit videos on Google Vids

www.snipca.com/56488

In August, Google released its video-editing tool Vids for everyone to use, having previously restricted it to Workspace subscribers (from £5.09 a month). It looks similar to Google Slides, and offers over a hundred templates and transitions. You can add images, stock media, audio, objects and more, with the ability to customise transitions.



Click File then 'New video' to create videos using Google Vids

Once done, you can share the video by sending a link, or by downloading the MP4 and sharing that. It's wonderfully simple, though you'll still have to pay to create videos using AI prompts. Start by clicking File at the top left and selecting 'New video' (see screenshot above).

4 Play any song on Spotify

www.spotify.com/download

In mid-September Spotify lifted its restriction on free users being able to play songs on demand. You can now simply search for a track (see screenshot above) and play it. Previously, you had to select a playlist and then listen to it in shuffle mode (or pay £11.99 a month to lift all restrictions).

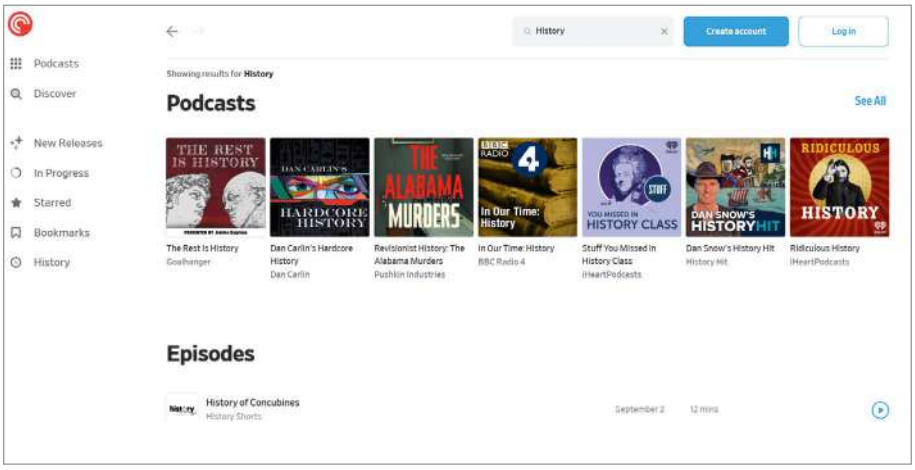
Search for any track on Spotify to play it for free, but some restrictions remain

However, Spotify says each user has a "daily allocated amount of on-demand time" to search for specific tracks. It hasn't explained what this means in detail, so you'll just have to be careful with your searches until you hit your limit. After that you'll be restricted to skipping six songs every hour.

5 Play podcasts online for free

www.snipca.com/56492

In March, podcast tool Pocket Casts made its online player (see screenshot below) free, saying podcasting should be "free, open, and available to everyone – on any device, without restrictions". You don't even need to create an account, though doing so gives you extra features such as syncing playback across devices and bookmarking moments in episodes (see www.snipca.com/56490). Previously, you had to pay $4 a month to play podcasts online.



Pocket Casts now lets you search for and play podcasts online for free

6 Open PDFs in tabs

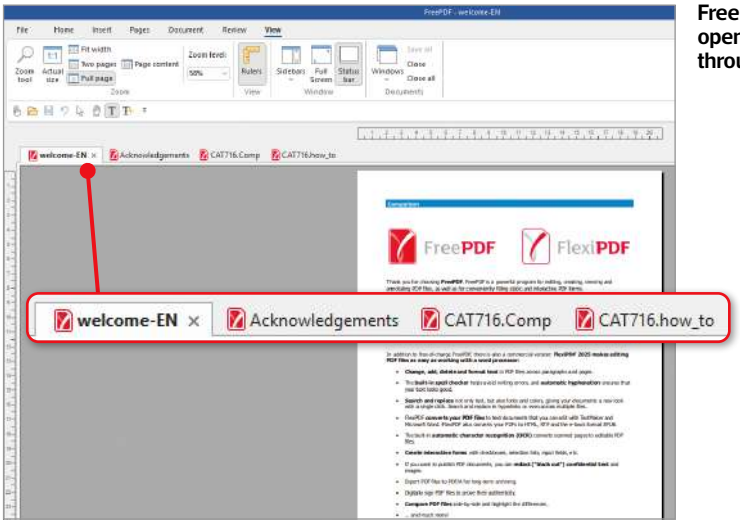
www.snipca.com/56495

SoftMaker, one of our favourite developers of free office tools, released FreePDF 2025 in February and added some useful options previously available only in its paid-for FlexiPDF program.

The best of these let you open multiple PDFs through tabs (see screenshot right) and see PDFs across multiple pages. It has plenty of basic editing functions, such as rotating, resizing and reordering, but you'll have to subscribe to FlexiPDF (£34.90 a year) to edit text or insert blank pages – compare FlexiPDF with FreePDF at www.snipca.com/56493.

Downloading FreePDF is a little tricky. Rather than doing it from SoftMaker's site, visit download-mirror site DownloadCrew (www.snipca.com/56544) and click the orange Download button at the top right. This will direct you to a new page where you'll see an orange download-progress bar. When it has downloaded, click to open the file.

SoftMaker may send you emails to verify and a product key to enter, but you don't have to pay.



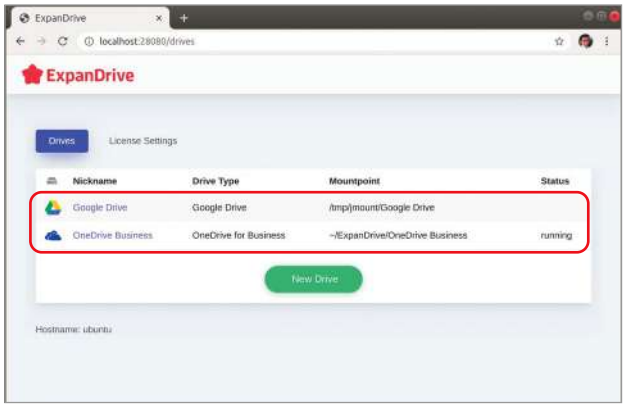
FreePDF now lets you open multiple PDFs through tabs

7 Draw with Adobe Fresco

www.snipca.com/52589

Adobe gave everyone an early Christmas present last year by making its iOS digital drawing and painting app Fresco free to use – it previously required a £9.99 yearly subscription. It contains more than a thousand brushes (see screenshot above right) for creating digital art using an Apple Pencil, stylus or your finger. There's also a free Windows version (www.snipca.com/56510), but no Android one yet.

Adobe's drawing and painting app Fresco contains over 1,000 brush styles



ExpanDrive lets you access online storage and servers as though they're folders on your PC

8 Access online storage as if it's on your PC

www.expandrive.com

IT infrastructure firm Files.com bought ExpanDrive in July and instantly made it free for up to 10 users (previously it cost $49.95 – about £37). It lets you access online storage and servers like they're folders on your computer (see screenshot above) – through Finder on Macs and File

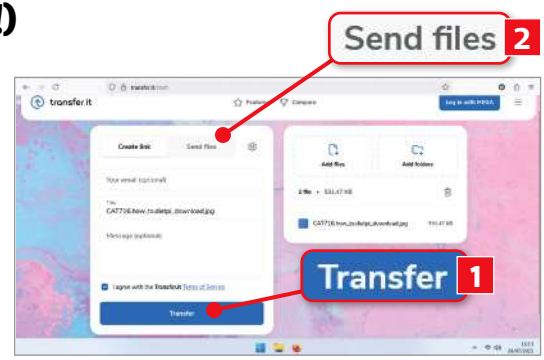
Transfer huge files for free (but be quick!)

New Zealand-based online-storage provider Mega offers one of the most generous free storage plans – giving you a whopping 20GB (https://mega.io). In June, it also launched one of the most attractive file-transfer services we've ever seen. Called Transfer.it, it lets you transfer huge files with no limits – all for free.

From January, however, all transfers will expire after 90 days, and they can only be downloaded 100 times. To remove these restrictions, you'll need to upgrade to the Pro plan for €2.99 (£2.60) a month. Still, for large files that you – or others – only need to access for three months, it's ideal.

To use it, visit www.snipca.com/56538 and click the red 'Try transfer.it now' button. Next, click 'Add files' and navigate to the file you want to share. Select it, click open, then choose whether to create a link to share via email or instant messenger, or send the file directly to the recipient's email.

To do the former, click Transfer (1 in our screenshot) and your files will be uploaded to the Mega server. When this process has completed, click 'Copy link'. To do the latter, click 'Send files' 2 and enter the recipient's email address and (optionally) your email address and a message, before clicking Transfer.



Explorer in Windows. There's a Linux version too: www.snipca.com/56605.

You can open, edit and save files directly without having to copy them. It works with services like Apple iDrive, Google Drive, OneDrive, Dropbox and FTP. Read more at www.snipca.com/56497.

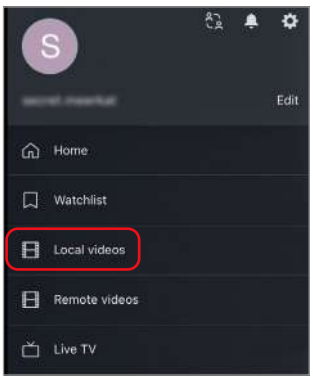
9 Stream locally for free on Plex

Android www.snipca.com/56498
iOS www.snipca.com/56499

When Plex revamped its mobile apps in April, it made it free to stream from them on your local network (see screenshot below). Before that, to stream for longer than 60 seconds you had to subscribe to a Plex Pass, or pay a one-off $5 activation fee.

If that was the good news, the bad was Plex announcing that you now need a Pass to stream personal content remotely (ie, outside your home). And the even-worse news was the price of a Pass rising sharply from $4.99 to $6.99 (monthly); and from $39.99 to $69.99 (yearly); and $120 to $250 (lifetime).

Mind you, this was the first increase for 10 years, as Plex explained at www.snipca.com/56604. We wouldn't sign up at these prices though. Plex regularly has sales, including in September 40-per-cent off the annual pass. During last year's Black Friday sales it cut lifetime passes by 25 per cent.



You no longer need a Plex Pass to stream on your local network

10 Record your PC screen for free

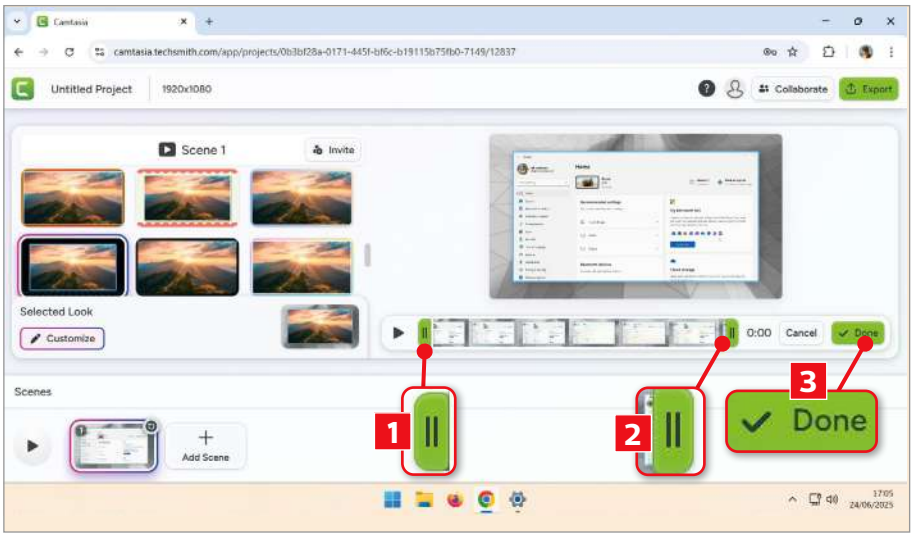
TechSmith's Camtasia has long been one of our favourite tools for screen recording, but with subscriptions starting at £160 a year it's not cheap. So we were pleased that in June TechSmith launched a free online version of Camtasia that runs entirely in your browser (except Firefox). It doesn't have the full set of features you'll find in the paid-for versions, but it's fine for simple screen recording.

Visit www.snipca.com/55307 then click Start Recording Now. This will take you to a sign-in page. If you don't already have a TechSmith account, click 'Sign up', enter an email address and click Continue. Work through the remaining sign-up steps, which includes clicking a link sent to your inbox to verify your address.

Decide what you want to record by clicking Screen, Camera or 'Screen and Camera', then tell Camtasia exactly what it's going to capture by clicking the appropriate option in the box that appears. The options are a browser tab, a program window or your entire screen. You can then choose a background for your video.

When you're ready, click Start Recording. When you've finished, switch back to the browser and press the stop button. To edit your video, click the Trim button below the playback window to display a small film strip of your recording. Drag the green handles at the left and right ends of the strip towards the centre.

Dragging the handle on the left (1 in our screenshot left) removes frames from the start of the video, while the one on the right 2 removes frames from the end. When you've isolated the part you want to keep, click Done 3.



Once you've recorded your screen using Camtasia, drag the green handles to remove frames from the start and end you don't need

Use Affinity apps for free (but be *very* quick!)

Canva, which bought Serif in 2024, has made the iPad versions of its three Affinity apps (Designer 2, Photo 2 and Publisher 2) free – but possibly only until 30 October. That's when Canva will probably reveal a new set of apps, using the slogan 'Creative freedom is coming' (www.snipca.com/56506).

Download the apps from the following links: Designer 2 (www.snipca.com/56507); Photos 2 (www.snipca.com/56508, pictured); and Publisher 2 (www.snipca.com/56509).

Now tap 'Buy Now' and confirm the purchase. Follow the instructions to register the apps with your Affinity account (which you'll need to create if you don't have one).

The apps say they're available as a free trial for seven days, but tapping the Buy Now button shows the price as $0. Previously, they cost $18.49 (about £15) each. Bear in mind that the apps may stop working after 30 October if Canva announces a new range of tools.

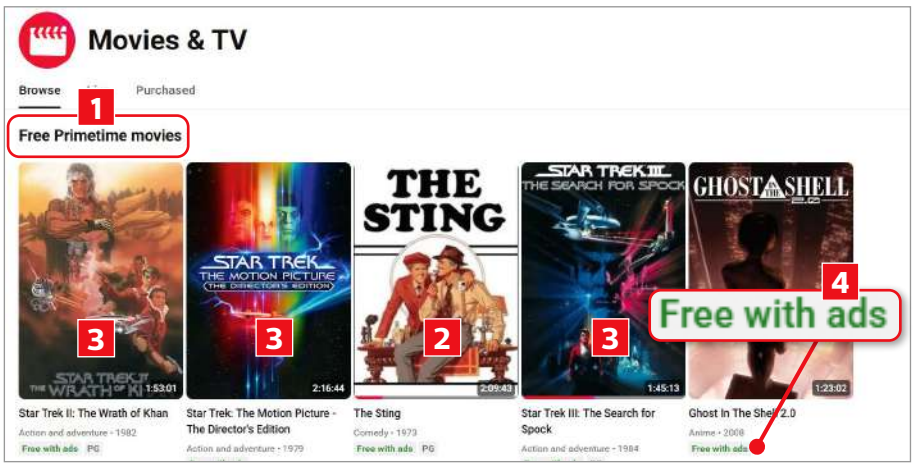
CLASSIC FILMS & MODERN TV

11 Watch classic films on YouTube

www.snipca.com/56565

YouTube is now home to some genuinely classic films that are also found on paid-for streaming services. They're all listed under the 'Free primetime movies' heading on YouTube's official 'Movies & TV' site (1 in our screenshot right). At the moment it includes masterpieces such as *The Sting* 2 (starring the late Robert Redford), Woody Allen's *Manhattan*, *Trading Places*, *Forrest Gump*, Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps*, as well as the original *Star Trek* films 3.

What's available regularly changes because licences for free streaming are usually quite short. But that's not a bad thing. If you can't find anything you want to watch, come back in a few months to see what's new. You'll have to put up with ads of course, as indicated by the green label 4.



You can now watch some genuinely great films for free on YouTube, including the Oscar-winning *The Sting*

12 Watch 12 series of *Pointless* without a TV licence

www.snipca.com/56516

First broadcast in 2009, *Pointless* is now one of the UK's best-loved quiz shows. You'll find old episodes on BBC iPlayer and U&Dave, but you need the TV licence for those. Not so if you watch it on-demand on Tubi (see screenshot above right), the popular ad-supported channel. It contains the first five series (up to 2012), then series nine to 15 (2014 to 2016).

Note that since 1 April, the TV licence costs £174.50 a year – up from £169.50. You'll need a licence to watch any of Tubi's *live* channels. Current TV licensing rules let you watch anything on-demand without a licence, except for shows on iPlayer (it's all clearly explained at www.snipca.com/56521).

Computer active READER OFFER!

Buy Windows 11 Pro for just ~~£79.99~~ £69.99!

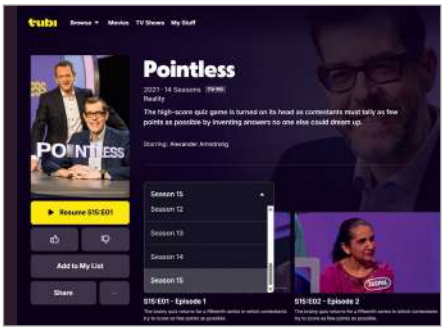
ADD A DISC FOR £5.95

In this special offer you can buy **Windows 11 Pro** for just £69.99 – that's £150 cheaper than Microsoft's full price of £219.99.

To buy **Windows 11 Pro**, visit **www.snipca.com/41588** and click the red Buy Now button on the right.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **4 November, 2025**. It's a lifetime licence for one computer.



You can watch 12 series of *Pointless* for free on Tubi

See box below for more TV shows you can now watch for free on Tubi – and our answer to Alison Kirkland's question in Reader Support (see page 71) for how to create a Tubi watchlist.

More free shows on Tubi

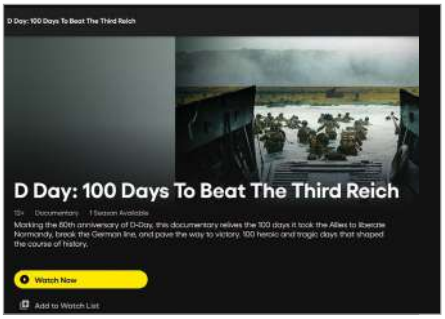
- *The I.T. Crowd* www.snipca.com/56519
- *Location, Location, Location* www.snipca.com/56520
- *Masterchef: The Professionals* www.snipca.com/56522
- *Mythbusters (pictured)* www.snipca.com/56518
- *Ready, Steady, Cook* www.snipca.com/56517

13 Watch D-Day documentary on Pluto TV

www.snipca.com/56523

The rules that apply for Tubi (see above) also cover Pluto TV, another superb source of free on-demand (and live) TV and films. One of the best new shows is the documentary *D Day: 100 Days to Beat the Third Reich* (pictured below left), which you've previously needed a Sky or Apple TV+ account to watch. Released last year to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day, it relives the 100 days it took the Allies to liberate Normandy and smash through the German line.

If you think someone you know might like a show, click the bottom-right arrow that appears when you start watching. You can then copy a link to the show to email them. See box above for more new shows you can now watch for free on Pluto.



This D-Day documentary is one of many programmes you can watch for free on Pluto TV

14 Watch five series of *Andromeda* on Rakuten TV

www.snipca.com/56576

Rakuten TV's choice of shows is less impressive than Tubi and Pluto, but you might still find some unexpected gems to watch. The highlight is probably all five series of the sci-fi show *Andromeda* (see screenshot below), which was inspired by *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry. Sci-fi fans might also like *Ascension* and *Sanctuary*, while for something more down to earth there are three series presented by UK chef Tom Kerridge. See the box below for more shows you can watch without a TV licence.

You can watch sci-fi show *Andromeda* for free on Rakuten

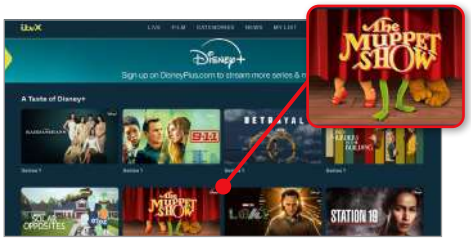
15 Watch Disney+ shows on ITVX

www.snipca.com/56156

This was a partnership we didn't see coming. ITVX now shows some Disney+ TV programmes for free – no catches (apart from adverts). Click the link above to see what's available, or scroll down the Home screen in the ITVX app on your TV.

After a disappointing first few months, there's now a lot more to watch, and the emphasis is on the first series of US shows. It's an eclectic mix, including *9-1-1*, *The Kardashians*, *Only Murders in the Building* and *Station 19*. The highlight is also the most surprising inclusion – the first season of *The Muppet Show* (pictured below) from 1976, featuring guest appearances by John Cleese, Bruce Forsyth, Roger Moore and Peter Sellers.

This free content is all the more pleasing because Disney+ recently increased prices across all its packages - for details see www.snipca.com/56564.



The original *Muppet Show* from the 1970s is the highlight of Disney+'s free shows on ITVX

More free shows on Pluto

- *Close Encounters Down Under* www.snipca.com/56566
- *Dictators' Hideouts* www.snipca.com/56568
- *Italia 90: When Football Changed Forever* www.snipca.com/56525
- *Jungle Planet* (pictured) www.snipca.com/56569
- *Land of the Lost* www.snipca.com/56524

More free shows on Rakuten

- *Cold Water Cowboys* (pictured) www.snipca.com/56574
- *Hunter* www.snipca.com/56575
- *Mutant X* www.snipca.com/56573
- *Posh Pawn* www.snipca.com/56572
- *Z Nation* www.snipca.com/56571

FANTASTIC AI TOOLS

16 Use Perplexity's Comet browser

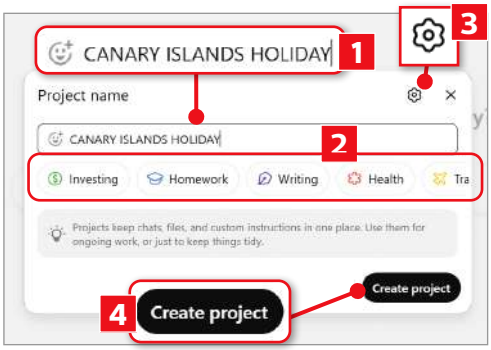
A few months ago, OpenAI was rumoured to be making a ChatGPT browser. We thought this could be the long-anticipated contender to finally knock Google's Chrome off its perch. But nothing's arrived yet, and OpenAI's rival Perplexity has stolen its thunder by making its Comet browser free (it was previously $200 a *month* – that's about £150).

Perplexity's move isn't surprising because it's more of a search engine with a chatbot attached than a standalone chatbot. This makes it closer to Brave and DuckDuckGo, which both have browsers and search engines. It wants Comet to "travel the web" with you by building AI seamlessly into the browsing experience, rather than being "tacked on to a traditional browser" (probably a criticism of how Microsoft and Google have added AI to Edge and Chrome).

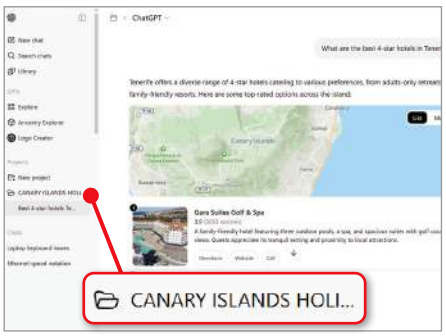
Downloading it from www.snipca.com/56598 is fast and easy. When you first open it you'll see options for importing history, settings, bookmarks and passwords from Chrome, Edge and Internet Explorer (1 in our screenshot below). Click 'Do this later' 2 at the bottom left to skip this step. If the spacey sound effects are too annoying click the top-right speaker icon 3 to turn them off.

Its main AI component is Comet Assistant, which summarises web articles, compares online sources, answers questions and automates tasks like form-filling or calendar updates. Give it a go by clicking the 'Try Assistant' button at the bottom (see screenshot below right).

To use some of its AI tools in full – such as deep research on a topic – you still need to subscribe (starting from $20 a month). But enough of its features are free to make Comet the best new browser we've seen for years. Read our Easy When You Know How column in the next issue for detailed instructions.



Enter a title for your ChatGPT project and click 'Create project'...



...then click it in the left-hand menu to open it at any time

17 Organise ChatGPT conversations in folders

In late September, OpenAI made Projects free in ChatGPT, letting you organise conversations into folders. Previously this was part of ChatGPT Plus ($20 a month). Open ChatGPT (https://chatgpt.com) then click Projects in the left-hand sidebar (if this isn't open, click the top-left 'Open sidebar' icon). Now give your project a name (1 in our screenshot above) – ignore the options below 2. Click the cog 3 to decide whether you want the project to remember other chats you have in ChatGPT.

Finally, click 'Create project' 4 and your title will appear at the top of a new chat, giving you the option to add up to five files, such as documents and images. To reopen your project at any time, click Projects in the left-hand menu then click the title (see screenshot above right). You can move existing chats to the project by dragging and dropping them from the Chats list.

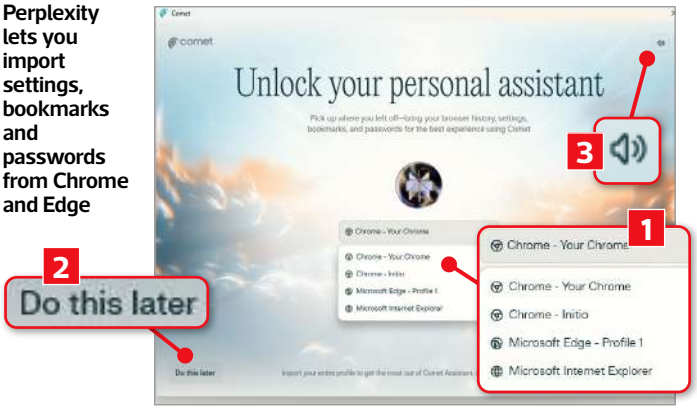
18 Share your phone camera with Google Gemini

Like OpenAI and ChatGPT, Google keeps adding more advanced large language models to the free version of Gemini that previously required a £19 monthly subsciption. But we're more impressed by Gemini Live becoming completely free in the mobile app (Android www.snipca.com/56599; iOS www.snipca.com/56600). It saves you having to type commands or press the microphone button to speak them.

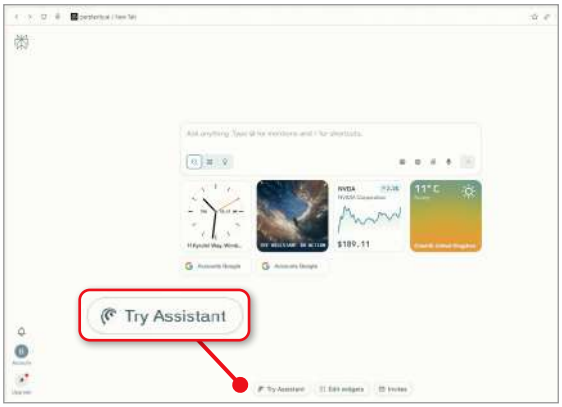
Instead, you can chat aloud to Gemini as if you were talking to a real person, interrupt it mid-response to ask another question and pause conversations to return to later. It's available hands-free, so you can keep chatting to the assistant while you get on with other things, even when your phone is locked.

In June, Google improved Gemini Live further by adding options to share your phone's camera and screen. This means you no longer need to describe what you're seeing to Gemini, but can simply point your camera at the object or scene to ask questions about it. You can also show Gemini what you're viewing in other apps, such as a web page, video or document, to have it analyse and discuss the content.

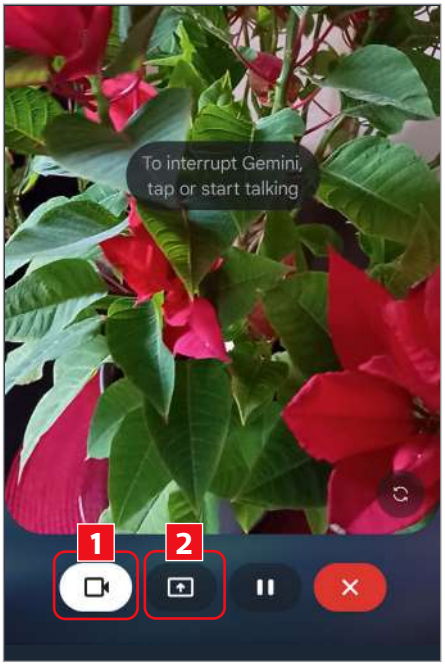
To try it, tap the Live button in the bottom-right corner to start a spoken conversation. Now press the Camera icon



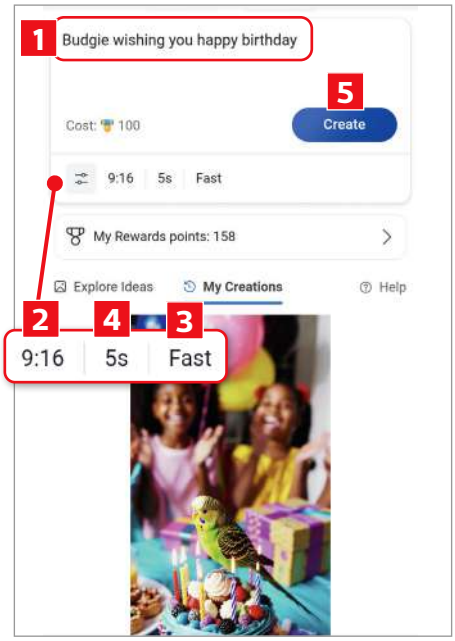
Perplexity lets you import settings, bookmarks and passwords from Chrome and Edge



Click 'Try Assistant' to use Comet's AI as you browse



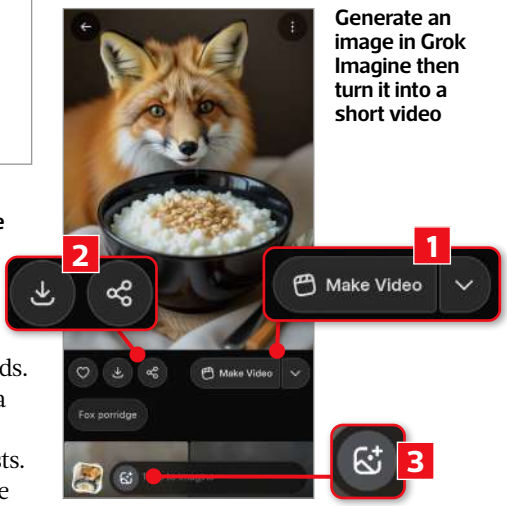
You can now share your phone screen with Google Gemini during voice chats



Type your video description, set an aspect ratio, then decide whether you want it to be made 'Fast'

How we saved £852.79

Working out how much money these freebies saved us wasn't an exact science. It required estimating some of the amounts and many conversions from dollars into pounds – so on a different day the total might have been slightly higher or lower. And subscription prices are forever going up, particular for TV streaming. But we're sticking with our figure, give or take the odd tenner.



Generate an image in Grok Imagine then turn it into a short video

19 Generate AI images with Sora

One of the best video-generating tools is OpenAI's Sora (https://openai.com/sora), but you'll need to subscribe to ChatGPT Plus or Pro ($20/$200 a month). A free alternative appeared in the summer when Microsoft launched Bing Video Creator, which is powered by Sora. A desktop version is coming soon, but for now you have to use it in the Android or iOS Bing Search app - visit www.snipca.com/55068 and choose which to install.

Once done, open the app and tap the bottom-right icon (with four squares inside), followed by the Video Creator icon under 'All apps'. Now type a description for a video (1 in our screenshot above right) then choose the aspect ratio 2, and whether you want it to be made 'Fast' 3. This takes "a few minutes" to make the video and you get 10 for free when you install the app, after which each one costs you 100 Microsoft Rewards. There's a 'Standard' option that takes "a few hours", but sometimes took only a few minutes longer than Fast in our tests.

Confusingly, Video Creator shows five seconds 4 as though it's an option you can change, but you can't (at least, not yet). Tap 'Create' 5 when you're ready. Once it's been created, tap it for options to download and share it.

20 Make still images move with Grok Imagine

In August, Elon Musk's Grok made its video-generation tool Imagine free for everyone, having previously restricted it to SuperGrok subscribers ($30 a month). You can use it online by visiting https://grokimagine.ai then creating an account.

There are loads of options, including video resolution, duration and aspect ratio, but it takes time to work out how many credits you need for each mode. It's much easier to use Imagine in Grok's mobile app (Android www.snipca.com/56602; iOS www.snipca.com/56603), which produces six-second videos based on your descriptions, or images and photos you upload.

Open the app, allow Grok to access your images, then tap Imagine at the top. Now type a description at the bottom, tap the up-pointing arrow, then select one of the images. Next, tap Make Video (1 in our screenshot above) and Grok will turn the image into a six-second video, complete with sound effects. There are download and sharing options too 2.

You can also ask Grok Imagine to make your own photos move. Tap the 'add picture' icon 3, then Photos. Now pick a photo and wait for it to generate as a video. Tap 'Redo' to make it more 'Fun' – the results are, indeed, fun! ca

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Why you don't need the BritCard

Digital IDs offer a convenient way to prove your identity and age without needing a physical document. **Robert Irvine** explains how they work and how to get one

In September, the Government announced a new digital-ID scheme for all UK adults. It's been called informally the BritCard, though Government ministers have suggested this won't be its official name (www.snipca.com/56505). If the plan goes ahead, it will be introduced by the end of the current parliament (expected to be 2029).

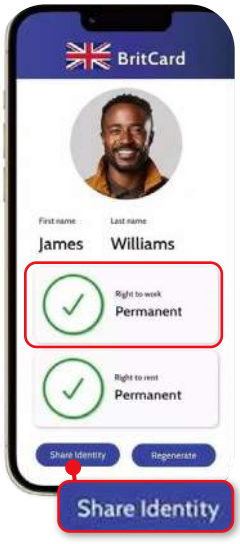
The news immediately triggered a widespread backlash, relating to privacy concerns about government surveillance and the risk of a national ID system being targeted by hackers. A petition to abandon the scheme has been signed by nearly three million people (www.snipca.com/56459).

Here we explain how digital IDs work and how to enjoy their benefits without worrying about the BritCard.

What is a digital ID?

A digital ID is an electronic representation of personal info that can be used to verify your identity online or in the real world. This includes your passport or driving licence, and saves you having to produce the physical document to prove your age and who you are.

For example, you can (where accepted) use your digital ID when opening a bank account, applying for benefits, renting a car, checking into a hotel and boarding a plane. It also lets you sign into supported online services without using two-factor authentication codes.



The proposed BritCard will let you prove who you are and your right to work in the UK

The concept of digital IDs has recently been expanded to include electronic versions of other documents, including travel passes, health records and financial details. This brings them closer to digital wallets like Google Wallet and Apple Wallet – indeed, the Government's digital-ID service is called Gov.uk Wallet (www.snipca.com/56461).

Is BritCard different from Gov.uk Wallet?

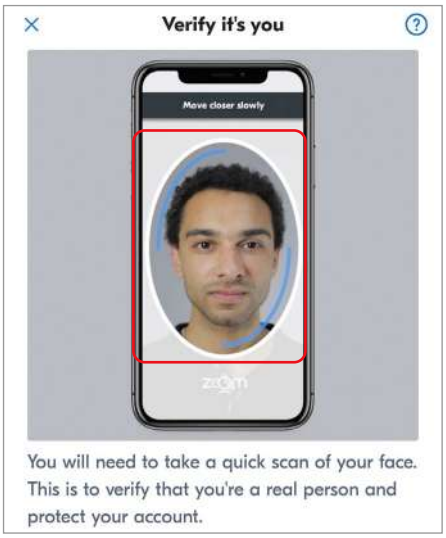
Yes, but they're interlinked. The BritCard (see mock-up below) will be stored in the Gov.uk Wallet app, alongside other government-issued digital documents. Contrary to media reports, BritCard will (at least initially) only be mandatory for 'Right to Work' checks. There will be "no requirement for individuals to carry their ID or be asked to produce it" (www.snipca.com/56476).

Several countries already use digital IDs, including Estonia, Denmark and India. The EU plans to introduce the Digital Identity (eID) Wallet for its member states by the end of 2026 (www.snipca.com/56460).

How do I create and use my digital ID?

Your digital ID is stored on your smartphone, so you first need to install the app for the relevant service and sign up for an account. You then let the app scan your face (see screenshot below) and use your phone's camera to scan an official identity document – such as your passport, driving licence or CitizenCard.

The app will match your face to the photo ID, and extract the necessary personal information, primarily your name and date of birth, but also the document number and expiry date. This data is pulled from the barcode or chip on the physical ID, as well as from the printed area, but doesn't include your


Verify it's you
Move closer slowly
You will need to take a quick scan of your face. This is to verify that you're a real person and protect your account.

Digital-ID apps scan your face and match it with your identity document

home address (unless you're scanning a driving licence), phone number or signature.

When you're asked to prove your identity or age, unlock the app and select the data to share. The other party can either scan a QR code or verify the information on-screen, without seeing any other personal details.

To use your digital ID on a website, select the 'Continue with digital ID' option (or similar). Scan the QR code provided using the digital-ID app, review the requested information and tap Share.

When a mobile app needs to verify your identity, choose your digital-ID app and it will open automatically. You can then grant permission to share the requested data.

How secure is your data in a digital ID?

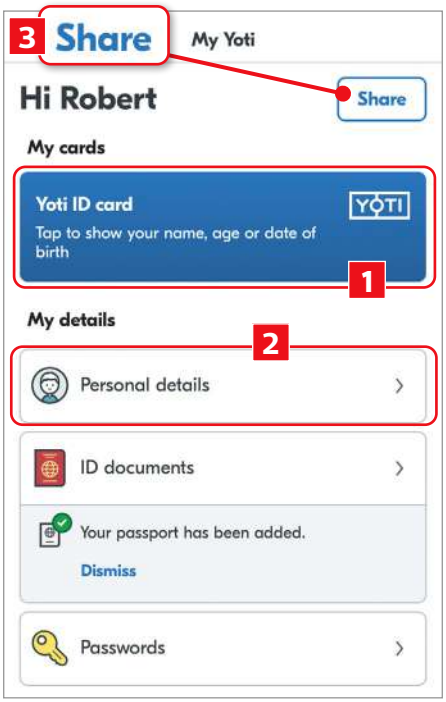
Digital IDs are secured using end-to-end encryption and either a PIN or your phone's biometric screen lock, such as your face or fingerprint. This makes them more secure than physical identity documents, which anyone can read.

If your phone is lost or stolen, no one will be able to access your personal information, unless they know your PIN and you haven't set up biometric protection. The digital-ID service creates a recovery file you can back up online to restore your data on a new phone.

HOW TO GET A DIGITAL ID NOW

Create a digital ID card with Yoti

Yoti (www.snipca.com/56462) has more than 14 million users worldwide, and its free digital IDs are government-approved as a valid form of identification. They can be used for 'Right to Work', 'Right to Rent' and DBS checks; proving your age when accessing adult-only premises and websites; buying age-restricted goods (though not alcohol) and more. What's less clear is whether Yoti users will be exempt from requiring a BritCard if and when it's introduced.

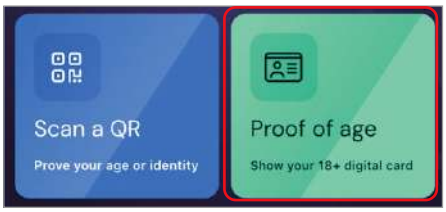


Use Yoti to create a digital ID and share personal info securely

Creating your Yoti digital ID is easy. Install its free app (Android www.snipca.com/56463; iOS www.snipca.com/56464), tap 'Get started' and select 'Create an ID card'. Agree to the terms and conditions, then add your phone number and set up a five-digit PIN. Allow Yoti to scan your face to confirm you're a real person and finish setting up your account.

Tap 'Yoti ID card' (1 in our screenshot above) then 'Add ID document' and scan either your passport or another form of ID. Yoti will extract the key details and add them to your account. Tap 'Add photo' to take a selfie for your Yoti ID Card. Once the card is created, choose which information to display each time you use it for verification.

Yoti can also store other personal details 2 including your email address(es), home address, NHS and National Insurance numbers, and website passwords, so you can provide that data when requested (it won't be shown on your Yoti ID Card). Tap the Share button top-right 3 to share specific information securely with other people.



Luciditi makes it easy to prove your identity and age

Other ways to create a digital ID

The Post Office's EasyID app (www.snipca.com/56467) is powered by Yoti and works in the same way. Though promoted as a way to prove your identity when collecting packages, it has the same design and features as Yoti. That also applies to Lloyds Bank's Smart ID app (www.snipca.com/56468), which uses Yoti's technology and is available to anyone – not just the bank's customers.

Alternatively, the new, government-certified service Luciditi (www.snipca.com/56477) offers two digital-ID accounts. Its 'Age' option proves your age in one tap when you access or buy age-restricted content or goods (see screenshot above), and lets you sign up using a facial scan without a passport. Its 'Identity' account goes further by digitising your identity documents for 'Right to Work or Rent' purposes.

Get ready for the Gov.uk Wallet

Gov.uk Wallet was set to launch this summer, but has been delayed by the BritCard proposals. Described as "entirely optional", it will store government documents such as your passport, driving licence and Armed Forces Veteran Card – the latter will be the first you can add once the wallet is available. The goal is for all government documents to be issued digitally through the wallet by 2027, though again this may be delayed.

To use Gov.uk Wallet, you'll need a Gov.uk One Login – if you don't have one, sign up at www.snipca.com/56473. Confusingly, there's already a Gov.uk ID Check app (www.snipca.com/56474), which confirms your identity using biometrics when you sign into the Gov.uk website using Gov.uk One Login.

This is separate from the new Gov.uk app (www.snipca.com/56472), which is currently in beta, and provides access to government information and services. Gov.uk Wallet will eventually be integrated with that app, and hopefully make things less complicated. ca

What if you don't have a smartphone?

One of the biggest concerns about BritCard is that people who don't own a smartphone won't be able to pass identity checks using the new digital system. The only reassurance from the Government is that it will "engage with groups who aren't as experienced with the digital world, like the homeless and older people".

It hasn't clarified whether this means handing out free smartphones or offering the new ID in the form of a physical card. In France, for example, identity cards have a chip containing relevant personal info, and are also available digitally as an app.

Not owning a smartphone means you can't use Yoti, Luciditi and other digital ID services, as they're not available on 'dumb' phones. But there are currently no plans to phase out physical passports and driving licences, so there's no need to panic.

WINDOWS 10 SURVIVAL GUIDE

YOUR PROBLEMS FIXED!

Struggling to sign up for Microsoft's Windows 10 Extended Security Updates? Having trouble upgrading to Windows 11? **Jonathan Parkyn** has solutions for all your post-W10 problems

In our Windows 10 Survival Guide (Issue 718, page 50), we offered nine potential routes for staying with or moving on from Microsoft's 10-year-old operating system, following the end of support. Now the 14 October deadline has passed, fresh problems have surfaced – from confusing Windows 10 Extended Security Update (ESU) enrolment glitches to stubborn Windows 11 upgrade errors. In this follow-up, we'll tackle your most common questions and provide practical fixes for your most pressing problems.

Q Why don't I see the enrolment message?

I've enrolled one HP laptop and a Lenovo model into Microsoft's ESU. Both sync with OneDrive. However, my third laptop, also made by HP, doesn't show the message 'Windows 10 support ends in October 25. Enroll in Extended Security Updates to help keep your devices secure'. Without this message, can I still enrol?

Maurice Seamons

By far the most common queries we've received have come from readers struggling to enrol their Windows 10 PCs in Microsoft's ESU scheme – either by paying the £25 fee or by syncing their data with OneDrive. Many people simply aren't seeing the prompt to enrol their computer. Here are some things to try.

First, make sure Windows 10 is running version 22H2 (check under Settings, System, then About). Also, the ESU enrolment prompt has been linked to the update KB5063709 (see screenshot below), released on 12 August. Head to Settings, 'Update & Security', then Windows Update and click 'View update history' to see whether this has been installed. If not, head back to the main Windows Update screen and click 'Check for updates'.

If you aren't able to update your computer, go to Settings, 'Update & Security', then Troubleshoot, click 'Additional troubleshooters', select the Windows Update option and follow the prompts. Try updating again. If you can't get the latest updates, some of your Windows Update components might be corrupted. To fix this, click Start, type cmd, then right-click the Command Prompt icon and select 'Run as administrator'. At the prompt, type each of the following lines in turn, pressing Enter:

```
net stop wuauserv
net stop bits
del /s /q%windir%SoftwareDistribution\*
net start wuauserv
net start bits
```

When you're done, reboot your PC and try updating again. If you still don't see the ESU prompt, read our next answer.

If you can't see the ESU enrolment prompt, check whether you've installed the update KB5063709

Q I've set up a Microsoft account, so why can't I enrol?

My PC, running Windows 10 22H2, has a local administrator account. But all the advice I've read says I need a Microsoft account to enrol in the ESUs. So, I cloned my system drive then set up an additional local account as administrator and converted this to a Microsoft account (also administrator). At startup I choose which one to use. I have OneDrive running in this account. However, despite all this, I can't see Microsoft's ESU screen. Do you know why?

Michael Cooke

Microsoft has been rolling out enrolment gradually, so even if your computer has all the latest updates installed you may not yet see the prompt. There may also be a bug preventing the ESU prompt from appearing. Either way, try to force the prompt by taking the following steps.

First, double-check that telemetry hasn't been disabled on your PC. If it has, the enrolment instructions won't appear. Open the Command Prompt as an administrator (see previous answer). At the prompt, type the following lines, pressing Enter after each one:

```
sc.exe config DiagTrack start= auto
sc.exe start DiagTrack
```

Next, type the following command carefully, then press Enter: reg.exe add "HKLM\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Policies\Microsoft\FeatureManagement\Overrides" /v 4011992206 /t REG_DWORD /d 2 /f (copy and paste this from www.snipca.com/56597).

Reboot your PC and run Command Prompt as an administrator again. This time, type cmd /c ClipESUConsumer.exe -evaluateEligibility and press Enter (copy and paste this from www.snipca.com/56606). Restart one more time, then head to Settings, 'Update & Security', then Windows Update and click 'Check for updates'. With any luck, you'll see the 'Enroll now' prompt at last.

Q Why does my Windows 11 upgrade keep failing?

My Dell Inspiron 15 5000 laptop has a 10th-generation Intel i5 processor, and so should handle an upgrade to Windows 11. But near the end of the process the Blue Screen of Death appears showing the Memory Management stop code. It then restarts and reverts to Windows 10 22H2. What's happening?

Nigel Herring

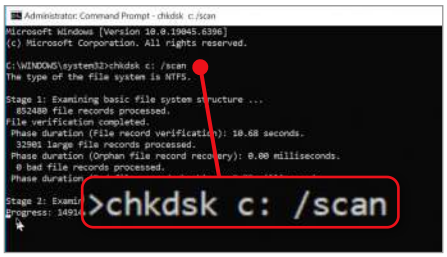
The Memory Management stop code you're seeing could mean your PC has a problem with faulty RAM or disk errors. To fix these, first press Windows key+R, type mdsched.exe into the box and press Enter, then click 'Restart now' – your computer will reboot and launch the Memory Diagnostic tool to check your RAM for errors, fixing any it finds where possible.

Next, launch a Command Prompt as an administrator (see previous answers), then type chkdsk c: /scan (see our screenshot above right) and press Enter. Allow the Disk Check process to complete, then restart your PC and try upgrading to Windows 11 again.

Q Why can't I block Microsoft's nags to upgrade?

I've successfully enrolled in Microsoft's ESUs, but I'm having trouble trying to block Microsoft's nags to upgrade to Windows 11 (option 5 in your Survival Guide). I've installed GRC InControl (www.snipca.com/56008) as you suggested. My Windows 10 version is 22H2, but what's shown in GRC InControl is 21H2 – and when I click on Take Control there's no response. Why doesn't it recognise 22H2?

Mike Biss



Type chkdsk c: /scan in Command Prompt to look for disk errors

We're not sure why InControl won't work on your PC. You could try downloading it again to see if a newer version has been released. If it still doesn't work, try a registry hack to 'lock' Windows Update to a specific version of Windows, theoretically blocking any upgrade nags.

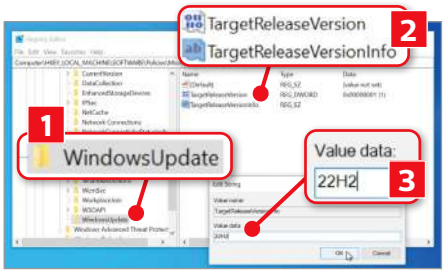
Type regedit into the Start menu and press Enter, then navigate to: **HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Policies\Microsoft\Windows\WindowsUpdate**

If the WindowsUpdate key doesn't exist, right-click the Windows key, choose New, then Key, and name it WindowsUpdate.

With the WindowsUpdate key selected (1 in our screenshot above right), look in the right-hand pane for TargetReleaseVersion and TargetReleaseVersionInfo 2.

If either (or both) are absent, you'll need to create them. Right-click an empty space in the right-hand pane and select New, then 'DWORD (32-bit) Value' and name it TargetReleaseVersion. Right-click in the pane again and select New, then String Value and name it TargetReleaseVersionInfo.

Double-click TargetReleaseVersion, set its Value data to 1 and click OK. Then double-click TargetReleaseVersionInfo and type 22H2 into the 'Value data' box 3 and click OK. Close Regedit and restart.



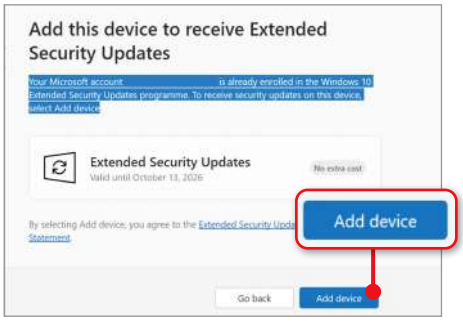
Edit the registry to stop Microsoft nagging you to upgrade to Windows 11

Q Why do I see different payment screenshots than you?

I'm trying to pay Microsoft for security updates, following your advice. However, I see different screens to the ones you published on page 52 of your feature. Am I doing anything wrong?

James Hawkyard

From the screenshot you've provided, it looks like you may have somehow enrolled in ESU already. You're entitled to enrol up to 10 PCs under the same Microsoft account, so perhaps you have more than one PC, and you already enrolled on the other one? If so, you're not doing anything wrong – you just need to click 'Add device' (see screenshot below) button to receive ESU updates your PC.



You can enrol up to 10 devices in Microsoft's ESU, so just click 'Add device'

Q Why does my upgrade to Windows 11 fail with 'invalid data trap'?

I can't update my Dell XPS 8930 PC to Windows 11. It's running Windows 10 22H2 and confirms it's ready to upgrade, but the process always fails near the end with an 'invalid data trap' error message and OXC1900101.

Michael Murphy

That error code usually refers to an incompatible driver. Visit the support page for your Dell PC to see if there are any driver or BIOS updates available and install them. ca

Buy our Windows 10 Survival Guide

Issue 718, containing our Windows 10 Survival Guide, sold out in many shops across the country. If you missed it, there's still time to buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/56596. We don't have many left though, so please hurry.

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

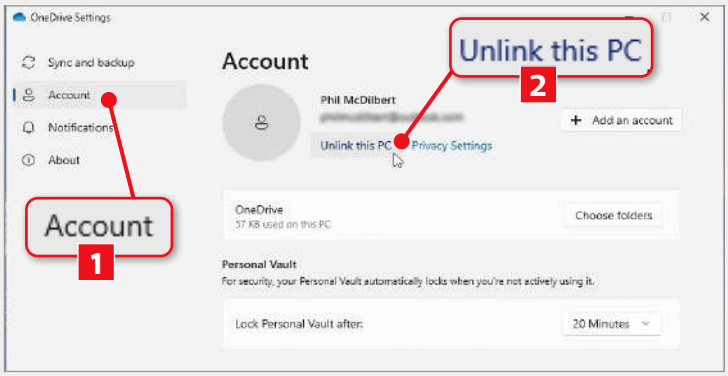
PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Can I undo OneDrive activation on my laptop?

Q I recently bought a new Windows 11 laptop. Foolishly, I dived straight in and activated OneDrive. However, with more than 5GB of data to sync, this seemed to paralyse the service. I'm now frequently reminded that I have exceeded my allocation. Is there any way I can release this laptop from OneDrive's clutches and start again?

If so, I would use OneDrive only for selected folders and documents, saving everything else to an external hard drive. I know I should have been more cautious and created system restore points so I could undo my actions. I hope you can help me out of this mess.

Peter Hutchinson



Select the Account tab in OneDrive's settings then click 'Unlink this PC' to deactivate it

A Windows is designed to lure people into activating all sorts of Microsoft-related tools and services during setup. So you're far from alone in falling into this OneDrive trap. Microsoft placed it there with the intention that people would fall into it.

Obviously, the company would like people in your situation to cough up for a subscription to unlock more online-storage space. Prices start at £19.99 a year for Microsoft 365 Basic, which gets you 100GB of OneDrive space (www.snipca.com/56226). However, we assume you have no desire to pay, so yes, you can absolutely start again.

First, locate the OneDrive icon in the notification area at the far right of the Windows taskbar. Right-click this, then choose Settings. Next, in the left-hand pane, select the Account tab (1 in our screenshot above right) then, in the right-hand pane, click 'Unlink this PC' 2. Confirm by clicking the 'Unlink account' button.

Your PC is now free of OneDrive. However, as you want to start again with it, there are a couple of things you need to do. First, you still have your local OneDrive folder containing more than 5GB of files on your PC's hard drive. Similarly, the cloud version of the folder is still on Microsoft's servers, containing whatever is in your local OneDrive folder.

Start by logging in at www.onedrive.com. Select any files or folders you want to remove by clicking the small tick icon to the left of an entry, then click Delete at the top. Confirm by clicking Delete.

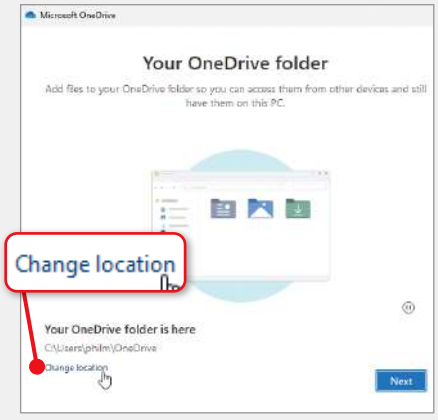
Next, on your PC, press Windows key+E to open File Explorer then navigate to your existing local OneDrive folder, which will be something like **C:\Users\peterh\OneDrive**. If you want, you can use a new folder for OneDrive (which we'll create soon), or you can delete some or all of the contents of the existing one to ensure it's below the free 5GB limit.

Once you've done that, it's time to set up OneDrive again. Right-click its icon in the notification area again, then click the 'Sign in' button (see screenshot below right). If prompted, enter your Microsoft account email address and password and click Next. Then decide whether you want to keep the existing local OneDrive folder as previously mentioned, or choose a new one by clicking the 'Change location' link (see screenshot below) and picking a new location on your hard drive. If you're sticking with the existing folder, when you click Next, OneDrive will warn you that the folder already exists. That's fine, so click 'Use this folder'.

Finally, use the sliders to tell OneDrive what you want to back up (the Documents folder in this context is your OneDrive folder). Click Next, and you're all set.

OneDrive isn't connected
Sign in to OneDrive to get started
Sign in to OneDrive to get to your files and sync them on this device.
Sign in

To set up your new OneDrive folder, first sign into the service using your Microsoft details



To start again with a new OneDrive folder, click 'Change location' and navigate to it

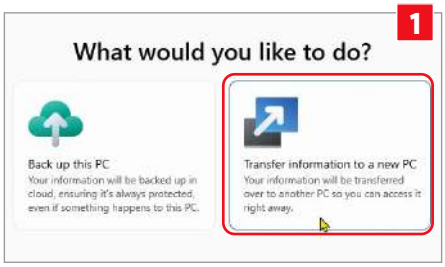
Can I transfer all my programs, data and settings to a new PC?

Q I want to transfer my programs and other stuff from my 12-year-old Windows 10 PC to a new computer. However, I've read in your magazine that this is not a good idea, and that I should install all my programs from scratch. I think you said it was because old drivers might interfere with the new system.

The problem is that I have no idea where several of my old programs came from. What's more, I've made a number of registry tweaks to fine-tune my system, all with the help of your advice. Can you suggest any way I can transfer my programs, or do I really have to start again with my new PC?

Sam Clarke

A We wish there were a magic button we could press to transfer literally everything from an old PC to a new one, but sadly there isn't. So yes, you're right, our advice when setting up a new PC is to reinstall all your programs from scratch. You will also need to reapply any registry tweaks you made.

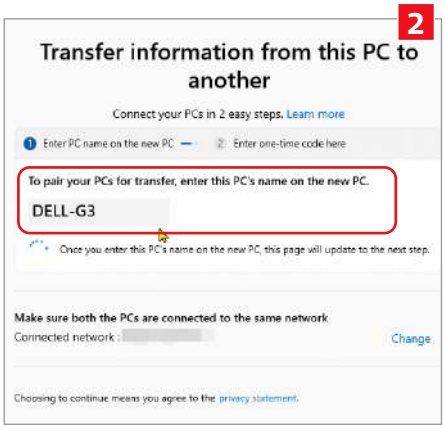

1
What would you like to do?
Back up this PC
Your information will be backed up in cloud, ensuring it's always protected, even if something happens to this PC.
Transfer information to a new PC
Your information will be transferred over to another PC so you can access it right away.

In 'Windows Backup' on your Windows 10 PC, click 'Transfer information to a new PC'

Attempting to do it any other way is a recipe for disaster.

Thankfully, you can transfer both your data and Windows settings, either through OneDrive or a local network, using the Windows Backup tool. This has been part of Windows 10 since 2023 and is built into Windows 11 too. It will even reinstall Microsoft Store apps automatically if you ask it to.

First, connect both computers to the same network. Then, on your Windows 10 PC, click Start, type backup then click Windows Backup. Now click 'Transfer information to a new PC' (see screenshot 1) followed by Next.


2
Transfer information from this PC to another
Connect your PCs in 2 easy steps. Learn more
Enter PC name on the new PC
Enter one-time code here
To pair your PCs for transfer, enter this PC's name on the new PC.
DELL-G3
Once you enter this PC's name on the new PC, this page will update to the next step.
Make sure both the PCs are connected to the same network
Connected network :
Change
Choosing to continue means you agree to the privacy statement.

Type the code from your Windows 11 PC into your Windows 10 PC to transfer your data

On your Windows 11 PC, type back up (this time with a space, because Microsoft struggles with consistency) then click 'Windows Back up'. Type the PC's name as displayed on your Windows 10 PC (see screenshot 2), and the Windows 11 PC will display a code. Type this into Windows Backup on your Windows 10 PC. Now simply follow the prompts to choose what data to transfer before clicking 'Start transfer'.

Will a Windows virus infect my Linux system?

Q As I use both Windows and Linux, I was wondering if setting up a dual-boot system on the same hard drive would cause a problem if Windows became infected with a virus or malware? I currently have Linux running on a mini PC and Windows 10 running on a desktop PC.

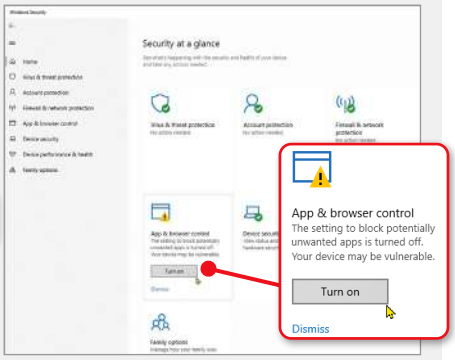
Paul Staniforth

A There's no guarantee that your Linux system would be safe if Windows becomes infected on a PC with dual-booting setup. It depends on the type of malware that afflicts the Microsoft system.

If it's the common type of virus that attacks personal files and folders, it shouldn't affect the drive's boot capabilities and therefore its ability to start Linux or Windows. However, if it's a nastier sort of infection that targets the Master Boot Record (MBR) or UEFI bootloader, this could destabilise both setups.

Using separate drives for each system is a much safer option, if a little less convenient. With virus protection enabled in Windows, however, the chances of falling victim to a virus are low. To check your protection status on your PC, click Start followed by the Settings cog, then 'Update & Security' followed by Windows Security. The page that appears provides a summary of what, if any, security actions it advises you to take. Finally, click the Open Windows Security button (see screenshot above left) to access the various control panels, paying particular attention to any with a yellow exclamation mark next to them (see screenshot above).

Click 'Open Windows Security' to check your PC is protected in all its vulnerable areas


Security at a glance
App & browser control
The setting to block potentially unwanted apps is turned off. Your device may be vulnerable.
Turn on
Dismiss

Pay attention to any control panels with exclamation marks next to them

What's happened to OS maps in Bing?

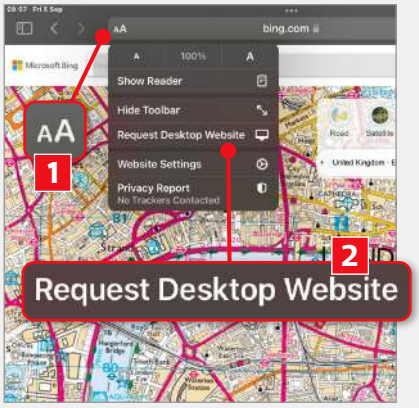
Q I've used Bing Maps in the past because it offers the option of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps. However, when I visited the site on my iPad recently, a map appeared but was labelled as a beta version. It didn't centre on my home address automatically, and the OS option was missing, along with a few other features. I contacted both Microsoft and Apple for an answer but they gave me the runaround. Do you know why this has happened?

Ernie Scales

A Yes, Microsoft is testing a new version of Bing Maps and seems to be making a bit of a mess of it.

Exactly which features you can or can't see seems to depend on various factors, including your location, your device and which browser you're using. Some people see the OS maps layer as soon as they visit Bing Maps, while others can't make it appear no matter what they try. Microsoft will probably fix this eventually.

The best fix we've found for an iPad using the Safari browser is to make sure you're opening the Bing Maps website in desktop mode. To do this, tap the AA icon (1 in our screenshot below), followed by Request Desktop Website 2.



To see OS maps in Bing on an iPad, click this option in the 'AA' menu at the top

Why does the on-screen display menu keep appearing on my friend's monitor?

A A friend of mine is having trouble with a monitor that's just out of warranty. The on-screen display (OSD) keeps appearing when it's not wanted, and can't be closed. As this covers part of the screen, my friend can't use the affected area. I've never seen this type of problem before. Do you have any ideas? I'm afraid I don't know the make or model.

Richard Curtis

A The most likely problem here is that dirt has collected around the button that launches the OSD. If the button gets stuck in a partially depressed position, even a little bit of desktop movement, such as vibrations from typing, could trigger the command to show the OSD.

Isopropyl alcohol can help remove sticky grime around a monitor's buttons

A bit of cleaning will probably solve this problem. First, ensure the monitor is unplugged from the mains, then use a barely damp cloth and a toothpick to clean around the edges of the buttons. These might be on the front bezel (as in the HP model pictured below) where they're easy to find, but often they're hidden on the sides, on the bottom or even at the back.

If your friend can get hold of some isopropyl alcohol, such as the spray bottle pictured left (around £7 from www.snipca.com/56227), this will help loosen and dislodge grime. Use it sparingly, and give the monitor a few hours to dry completely before you switch it back on.

This HP monitor has its buttons on the front, but others hide them at the side or under the bezel

Q: How do I make old software work in Windows 11?

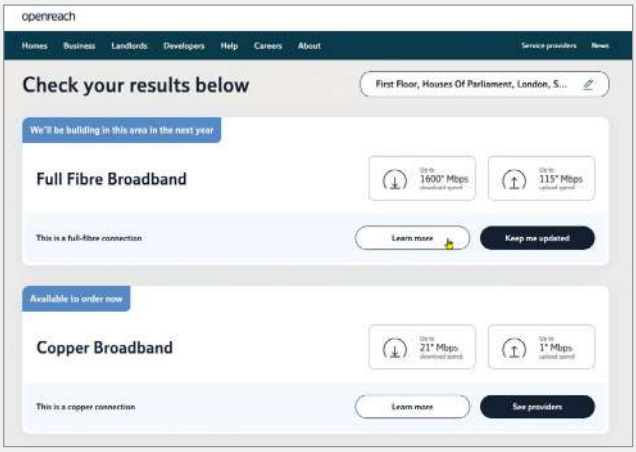
A: Issue 688, page 64 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

Will my village have a choice of fibre-broadband provider?

Q My village in west Berkshire has had fibre installed by a company called Gigaclear. BT Openreach says it has no plans to install fibre here but will still close its copper network. Does this mean I won't have a choice of supplier? Will I have to accept whatever Gigaclear offers?

Richard Weeks



Use the BT Openreach Fibre Checker to see when fibre will be available in your area

A As with everything related to the fibre rollout in the UK, it's complicated. BT Openreach is at the forefront of plans to bring fibre to all parts of the UK, but its current plans don't cover every last inch of the country. You can explore its rollout schedule at www.snipca.com/56228 (see screenshot).

That's where Project Gigabit comes in. It's a government initiative to subsidise rural fibre through third-party bidders. We don't know where you live but in your village the winning bidder was evidently Gigaclear. You can find details of Project Gigabit and the chosen contractors at www.snipca.com/56229.

So we can't say for sure what will happen when the copper network is switched off in your area. It may be that Gigaclear is the only fixed-line operator, or Openreach might revise its plans and build there too.

There will also be wireless alternatives. If your village receives good 4G or 5G signals, you can buy home broadband this way. For example, Three offers unlimited 5G broadband from £21 a month (www.snipca.com/56230).

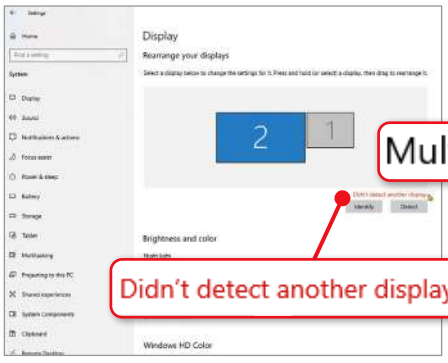
Elon Musk's Starlink is another option (www.starlink.com). This involves setting up a small satellite dish (pictured left) somewhere with a clear view of the sky. However, at its current price of £75 a month for speeds of around 100Mbps, it's not cheap. By contrast, Gigaclear charges just £17 a month for twice this speed – which really isn't bad.

Starlink offers broadband through a compatible satellite dish

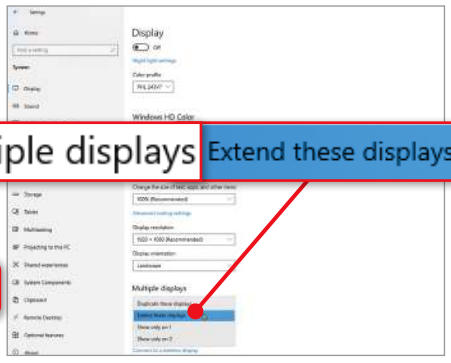
Why can't I move my cursor to my second screen?

Q I recently bought an Acer Aspire C24-195ES PC with Windows 11 Home installed. I plugged in an additional LG HDR monitor using the HDMI port. I can use the monitors separately but the cursor stops at the edge of one screen and doesn't move to the other. When I go to the Display page in Settings and click Detect, it says none detected. Device Manager shows that both displays are detected and working, although the device's drivers date back to 2006. Any ideas?

Mark Hogan



If 'Display Settings' already shows both your monitors, clicking Detect is unnecessary



To stretch your desktop over two or more screens, select 'Extend these displays'

A First, don't worry about the 2006 driver date. Microsoft does this on purpose to ensure its default Windows drivers don't override any newer manufacturer drivers you might install. Monitors don't usually need dedicated drivers, so they often use Microsoft's 2006 drivers. However, check the support page on Acer's website to make sure you have the latest graphics card driver for your PC – it's the one labelled VGA at www.snipca.com/56231.

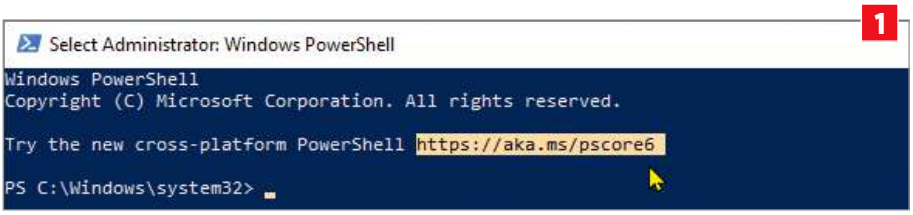
The Detect button in the Display Setting panel is another red herring. If the page already shows two thumbnails for your monitors, clicking Detect will result in the message 'Didn't detect another display' (see screenshot above left). We think that's what's happening here, because you say you can use the screens individually.

The problem seems to be that Windows isn't extending its desktop across both screens – it's either duplicating the desktop or showing it on only one or the other. To fix this, scroll down to the 'Multiple displays' heading, click to open the menu here and then choose 'Extend these displays' (see screenshot above).

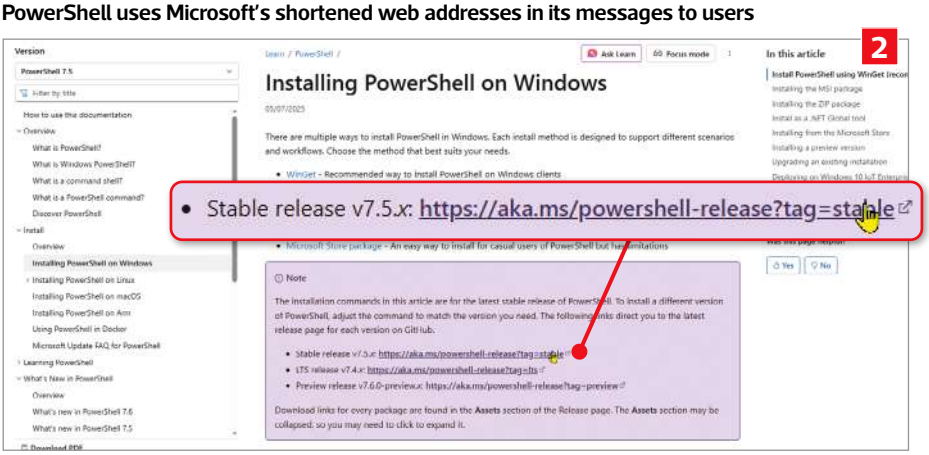
How do I update PowerShell?

Q *Computeractive* has been helping me with my computer problems for many years, but recently I've been stumped by a message that keeps appearing in Windows 11 PowerShell. This tells me I should update by going to https://aka.ms/PSWindows. It then adds 'PS C:\Users\JohnM'. Can you tell me what I have to do here?

John Meakin



PowerShell uses Microsoft's shortened web addresses in its messages to users



Use the address in PowerShell's message to visit the website and download the latest version

A You don't have to do anything – Microsoft is simply letting you know that a new version of PowerShell is available. If you do nothing, the version currently installed on your PC will continue to work.

PowerShell is what's known as a command-line tool. It's aimed at people who are confident in finding their way around a computer, often known as 'power users'. With this in mind, 'PS C:\Users\JohnM' is simply the command-line prompt (and PowerShell starting folder) on your PC. There are literally hundreds of things you could type into this, with millions of combinations and possible outcomes. Microsoft maintains a list of key commands at www.snipca.com/56232.

As for https://aka.ms/PSWindows, it's simply a website address encoded using Microsoft's in-house URL-shortening system (see screenshot 1). It's confusing because Microsoft doesn't actively promote this, but it assumes power users will know about it.

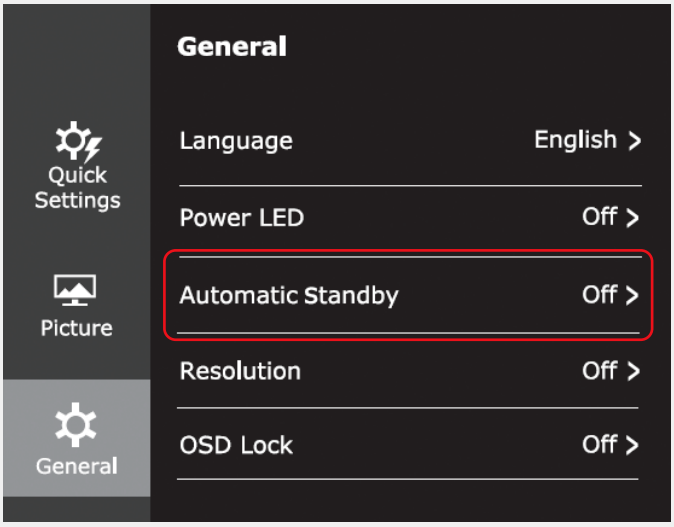
PowerShell regularly displays variations of this address when a new version is available. Again, you don't have to act on it, but if you want to install the latest version of PowerShell, simply copy and paste the URL into your web browser's address bar and press Enter, then click the link on Microsoft's PowerShell website to download the latest version 2.

Why is my monitor switching off automatically?

Q I recently bought a 31.5in LG monitor, which I've connected to my Windows 11 Pro mini PC. It works well except when I'm reading emails. Because nothing much appears to be happening on the screen, the monitor tends to go to sleep. Sometimes it shows a countdown timer, which ticks down in minutes. I bought a mouse jiggler to keep the PC awake but this didn't help.

I think the problem lies with LG's software, which seems to treat the device more like a TV set than a PC monitor. Is there a workaround for this problem?

Alex Macrae



Disable Automatic Standby in your monitor's settings to stop it going to sleep

A We suspect you're right that the monitor's built-in features are deciding that nothing is happening on screen, so it triggers a countdown before going into standby.

You didn't say exactly which LG model you have, but try opening its on-screen menu system – usually by pressing a button on the front, side or rear – and look through the settings for a feature called Automatic Standby (see screenshot), Sleep Timer or something similar. Use the up, down and OK buttons to select this option and switch it off.

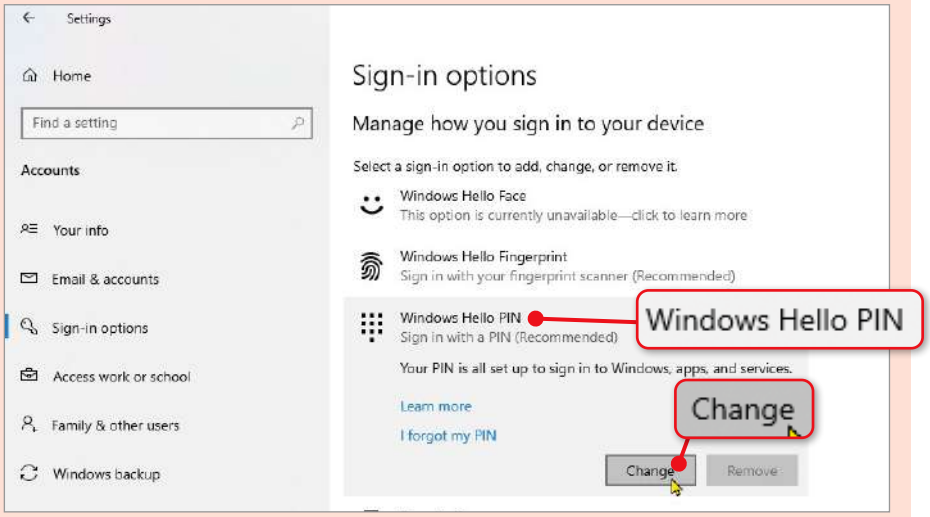
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Passwords, passkeys, passcodes and PINs?

Q A four-digit passcode has 10,000 variations (zero to nine, to the power of four). A four-letter password has A to Z to the power of four, or 456,976 variations. Why is there so much pressure to adopt the less-secure option?

John Clarke

Passkeys are more secure than passwords and PINs because they use advanced cryptography



If you're using the same Windows Hello PIN on more than one device, change it today

A We wonder if you're mixing up passcodes with passkeys. It's an easy mistake to make, not least because the names sound so similar.

With that clear, the fundamental difference between passwords, passkeys and PINs (which you referred to as passcodes) lies in what they protect and where they're stored. A traditional password is associated with an account. If you have a Microsoft account, for example, you can use your password to access your account and online services on any device.

In contrast, a Windows Hello PIN is tied to a specific device and is stored locally on the machine. On a modern PC, it's stored in the Trusted Platform Module (TPM) chip. Windows Hello progressively slows attempts at repeated incorrect guesses, reducing the chances that a brute-force attack attempt would succeed – but that's almost an aside.

Here things can start to get confusing, because in Windows a PIN can also act as a kind of passkey. A passkey is a newer standard designed to replace passwords. Instead of relying on a secret 'reusable' string of characters (a password), your PC or device holds a private cryptographic key, while the service you're signing into shares a matching public key. When you type a Windows Hello PIN, or use your fingerprint or face recognition, you're simply unlocking the private key on that device so it can prove your identity. The four-digit PIN is never sent anywhere, and no one can use it to log into your Microsoft account on another computer.

However, the security logic can break down because people often reuse PINs between computers and other devices. Unlocking a PC (using a PIN, password or anything else) also typically gives access to apps such as browsers, which may also store lots of passwords for accessing online accounts.

So, if someone knows or can guess your PIN, they may not be able to hijack your Microsoft account directly, but they can certainly get into that particular PC and everything stored on it, such as your browser logins, documents and apps.

In short, a Windows Hello PIN is safer than it looks, because it never leaves your PC. However, we'd recommend using different numbers on all your devices (see screenshot above), even though we understand the temptation to use the same one.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 5 Nov

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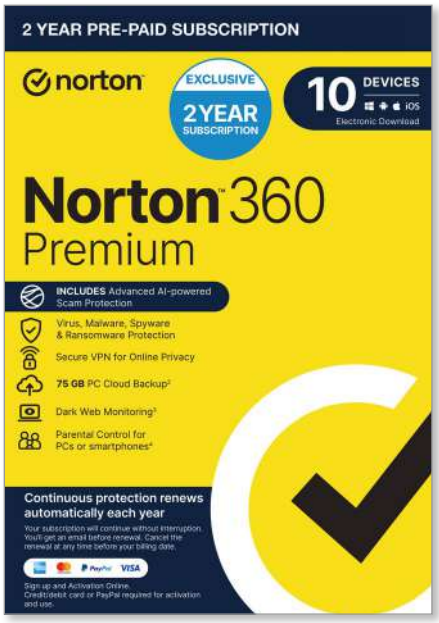

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Problems **Solved**

Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

How do I switch from my existing Norton subscription to your cheaper offer?

Q I need to sort out my PC antivirus urgently. My Norton 360 Premium subscription is for three years and it's currently due to automatically renew this November for £79.99. I noticed in Issue 719 (page 70) that I can get a 10-device, two-year deal for only £19.99 on *Computeractive*'s Software Store (www.snipca.com/56447, pictured above right). I want to switch to that, but I'm not sure how to move over from my existing Norton package. Do you know what I have to do?

Robert Patterson

A First, make sure you've turned off the 'Auto-Renewal' feature for your current subscription within your Norton account. Do this as soon as possible because Norton can charge for a renewal up to five weeks before the current subscription ends.

When you buy Norton from our store you'll receive an email containing your new two-year Licence key (which Norton calls a Product Key) and instructions for adding it to your existing Norton account. At that point you'll start your new subscription. You can buy it now and not activate it until your existing subscription ends, so you're not paying twice for the same protection. You don't need to uninstall and reinstall the software because your existing installation is kept up to date at all times online.

Once you buy Norton's antivirus from our Software Store we'll email you a Licence Key

How do you create a Tubi TV watchlist?

Q Issue 719's Cover Feature ('Best new TV apps') gave me lots of ideas about what to watch. I'm especially interested in Tubi (www.snipca.com/56153), which seems to have one of the biggest film catalogues you can watch for free. You mentioned on page 51 that you need to create an account to add shows and films to a 'watchlist'. Well, I've created an account but can't find the watchlist option. Do you know where it is?

Alison Kirkland

A Yes we do. Sign into your account online then look for films and programmes you want to watch. Now click 'Add to My List' on the left (see screenshot below left) – this will then turn into 'Remove from My List'. Once you've added several shows and films, click My Stuff at the top (see screenshot below right) and look in the 'My List' section (below 'Continue Watching'). You'll see all the content you've added. Hover over any of the images to bring up a play button and a 'Remove from My List' option.

Which issue had your advice on callers hanging up?

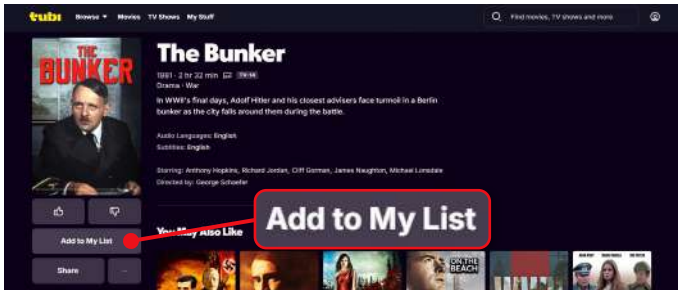
Q At the bottom of page 66 in Issue 718's Problems Solved you said the answer to 'Can a caller stop me hanging up?' could be found in Issue 962. Considering the last issue I received was 720, I assume this was an error. I've often wondered this, so would like to read your advice. Which issue was it actually in?

Vic Bracewell

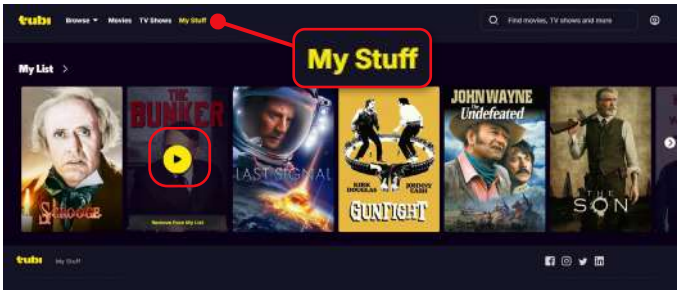
A Oops, apologies for that. The advice appeared in Issue 692 (page 66) in our answer to Phil Atkinson's question. Phil wanted to know whether his phone line would stay open if a caller didn't replace their receiver after the call ended. We said it was a real problem in the days of analogue phone systems because only the caller could 'terminate' a call by hanging up, not the recipient.

That's since changed because almost all telephone exchanges automatically clear the call seconds after either participant hangs up.

However, it's possible that some remote rural exchanges have yet to be upgraded, and not every phone company operates the same policy. If you're not sure, contact your provider to confirm its policies and find out which particular technologies your line uses.



Browse for a film or programme to add to your watchlist, then click 'Add to My List'...



...then click My Stuff at the top, scroll down to the My List section and hover over it to see a play button

Jargon Buster

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

Administrator Someone who can make changes to a computer that will affect others who also use it.

AMOLED An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel screens.

ANC Active noise cancelling. Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound designed to cancel the first.

ARM Processors that are more energy-efficient and are used in more devices than those made by AMD and Intel.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen.

Auracast New technology that lets Bluetooth devices broadcast audio to nearby earphones and hearing aids.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Biometrics Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

BIOS Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Bloatware Unwanted software built into a new device.

Blue screen of death Technically called a 'Stop error', this is shown when your PC crashes.

Bootloader A program that runs when a computer starts up and loads the operating system.

Brute-force attack A method of breaking encryption simply by guessing all possible passwords until the right one is found.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

CAPTCHA Distorted text you have to type to prove you're a human.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Ceramic Shield Protective phone glass with nano-ceramic crystals, making it less likely to be damaged when dropped.

Chatbot An AI program designed to recreate conversation with human users.

Clean install An operating system installation that overwrites all other content on the hard drive.

Command line A way to control a computer by typing instructions one at a time.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

CSV A file format used for storing data in spreadsheet programs.

Dark theme Showing white text on a black background.

DDR4/5 The newest, fastest types of computer memory.

Depth of field The distance between the closest and furthest objects that appear acceptably sharp.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Dual boot To set up a PC with two operating systems, so that one must be chosen each time it starts.

Emoji A small graphic that can be inserted into a text or email.

End-to-end encryption A way of encrypting messages so only the sender and recipient can read them.

Equaliser Controls that change the tone of music produced by a computer or portable player.

eSIM A virtual SIM card that's built into a phone.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

Fingerprinting A tracking method used by websites to identify you from the device and software you're using.

FLAC A type of digital audio file that can be created from CD with no loss of audio quality.

Fps See Frame rate.

Frame rate Number of still images, or frames, shown per second (fps) to create a moving image.

OCR The process by which printed text is scanned and converted into documents that can be edited.

Freemium A business model where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

FTP A system for transferring files between computers.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HDR Screen technology that improves the range of luminance between the darkest and brightest parts.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

IP67 International Protection marking. Denotes a device is resistant to dust, general dirt and sand, and can be placed underwater for 30 minutes at depths of up to 1m without effect.

IP68 Resistant to dust, general dirt and sand, and can be placed underwater for 30 minutes at depths of up to 1.5m without effect.

IP address A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology that has wider viewing angles and more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

IPTV Internet Protocol Television. Sending TV programmes over a PC network rather than cable, satellite or terrestrial transmission.

kHz 1,000 Hz.

Kill switch Quickly shuts down a device or app to stop it working, usually for safety or security.

Large language model A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

Lossless Music file formats that take up more space but provide higher sound quality.

Lux Unit of illuminance, measuring how much light falls on a surface. 1 lux = 1 lumen per square metre.

MagSafe A magnetic technology from Apple that allows for wireless charging and attaching accessories.

Matter Open-source standard that lets smart-home devices made by different companies work together.

Meme Something online that spreads quickly – typically videos, photos or catchphrases.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

Mirror Third-party download site that hosts software installers.

Mouse jiggler Device or software that keeps a PC's cursor moving automatically to prevent the system from going idle, locking or triggering screensavers.

MP3 A type of digital audio file often used on music players.

MP4 A type of digital movie file often used for portable players.

MPEG-4 A standard for compressing digital content that maintains very high quality.

MVNO A mobile provider that piggybacks on another network rather than its own.

NVMe An interface that lets solid-state drives work faster.

OCR The process by which printed text is scanned and converted into documents that can be edited.

OLED A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

Port forwarding Choosing which computer in your network a router should connect to.

PowerShell A Windows tool for automating commands.

Product key A unique serial number that must be typed in before a program will launch.

QR code A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM The computer's working area.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

RGB Advanced type of LED backlight that generates colours by projecting combinations of red, green and blue lights.

Sequential read/write Data from a file that a computer reads or writes in a strict order. Much faster than doing so randomly.

Sideload To install apps without using the official Android store.

SIM The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

SIM-swap A scam where criminals trick your provider into moving your phone number on to their SIM, stealing accounts and messages.

Spatial audio Digital surround sound that allows different sounds to envelop you from all directions.

Split tunnelling Lets you choose which apps use a VPN and which use your regular internet connection.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

Stop Code See Blue Screen of Death.

System restore point System files stored on a given date and time to which Windows can revert.

Telemetry Data gathered by software and sent to developers.

Tor Browser A web browser designed for anonymous surfing.

TPM A chip that stores keys which encrypt data on your hard drive.

Transducer A device that converts one form of energy into another.

Transition A way of joining two video clips together or moving from one clip to another.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

UEFI A modern replacement for BIOS.

Ultrawide A field of view that's wider than traditional digital cameras.

USB-A The original type of USB.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

VESA A mount for attaching monitors to stands, walls and PCs.

VPN Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAV file An audio file used for recording music to disk.

WEBM Video file format supported by major browsers and software.

Wh Watt-hour. Unit of energy that indicates the total amount of energy a battery stores.

Wi-Fi 5 A standard for Wi-Fi also known as 802.11ac.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than Wi-Fi 5.

Wi-Fi 7 Offers maximum speeds of around 46Gbps.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

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3	toob full-fibre broadband	Home900	**£25.00** No price rises	24 Months	**900Mbps** avg. speed	**£50** Bill Credit	**£250.00**
4	BT	Full Fibre 500	**£31.99** £35.99 from 31st March 2026	24 Months	**500Mbps** avg. speed	**£80** Gift Card	**£331.88**

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Know How

Intrigued by a new Android app for staying anonymous online, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Browse privately with Tor's VPN

"Take two bottles into the shower? Not me," scoffed the woman in the old Vidal Sassoon advert (www.snipca.com/56453). She just wanted to wash her hair and go, without spending time on shampoo *and* conditioner.

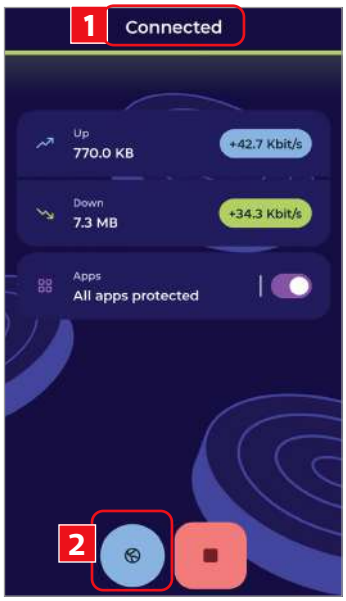
Similarly, I seldom use Tor Browser *and* a VPN to access the web privately. Because they both encrypt your data and hide your IP address, combining them seems like overkill. It also slows your internet connection by routing it through two different networks. Even Tor says: "Generally speaking, we don't recommend using a VPN with Tor unless you're an advanced user" (www.snipca.com/56454).

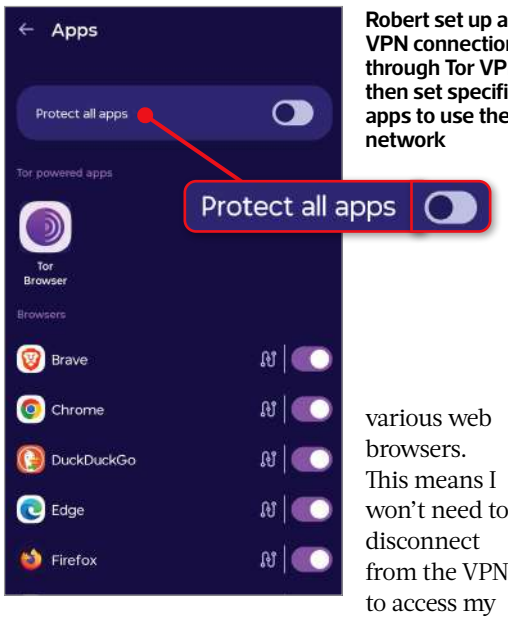
> You can foil nosy parkers by changing Tor's icon to make it look like a gardening app

However, that hasn't stopped the Tor Project creating its own VPN, as we reported in Issue 719 (page 6). Could this be its version of 'Wash & Go', offering the best of both privacy methods in one 'bottle' without sacrificing speed? I decided to find out.

I installed the Tor VPN app from the Google Play Store (www.snipca.com/56455) – it's currently only available for Android. I noted that it's still in beta – Tor warns to "expect bugs".

I opened the app on my phone, tapped 'Start testing' and was pleasantly surprised by its simple, attractive interface – I'd expected a more technical design. I pressed the big purple Connect button, gave Tor VPN permission to send notifications and tapped OK to set up a VPN connection.





Robert set up a VPN connection through Tor VPN then set specific apps to use the Tor network

After confirming I was connected (1 in our screenshot above), I tapped the blue globe icon 2 to view the list of exit locations for my Tor circuit. App traffic is routed through this circuit via the VPN, applying an extra layer of encryption.

The list covered nearly 30 countries, including the United Kingdom, United States and Australia, plus the European Union. Unlike in Tor Browser, Tor VPN let me choose the exit location, to make websites and apps think I was accessing them from that country.

To check it worked, I selected United States, opened Chrome and visited the website IP/DNS Detect (www.snipca.com/55877), as recommended in our recent Cover Feature about VPNs (Issue 717, page 57). Sure enough, the site pinpointed me as being in New York. However, I was unable to access US-only streaming services such as Hulu and Roku's new Howdy – I couldn't tell whether they were blocking VPN or Tor traffic, or both.

I was pleased that Tor VPN offers split tunnelling – allowing me to limit its encryption to specific apps, such as my various web browsers. This means I won't need to disconnect from the VPN to access my apps for banking, shopping and UK TV. Instead, I switched off the 'Protect all apps' option (see screenshot above) and enabled protection for individual apps, so they always use a Tor circuit when I'm connected to the VPN.

Tor VPN also has a kill switch on its Configure tab, which prevents apps from connecting to the internet when the Tor network can't be reached. Other settings include enabling 'bridges' for using Tor in places where it's blocked, and – to foil nosy parkers – changing the VPN's name and icon to make it look like a gardening or weather app.

Although loading websites and apps took a few seconds longer than usual, Tor VPN wasn't as painfully slow as I'd feared. My download speed dropped from around 12Mbps to 3.7Mbps, according to Speedtest.net, which is faster than the on-board Wi-Fi on most trains.

Tor hasn't revealed the type of encryption its VPN uses, or even made an official announcement about the app. But it certainly looks promising and could eventually rival Proton VPN – so you won't need to take both into the shower.

Need help with private browsing? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries Perplexity's new AI browser

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